

NOVEMBER

# STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY

AND TERROR

25¢



## WEBBED HANDS

*Murder in South Africa*

By **FERDINAND BERTHOUD**

Also

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**PHILIP HAZLETON**  
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November, 1931

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VOL. I, No. 2

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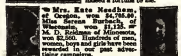
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#### ***½ as many colds***

Of 102 persons observed for a period of seventy-five days, one-third, known as "controls," did not gargle with Listerine at all; one-third gargled twice a day; the other third five times a day.

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#### ***Three times as many colds***

Those who did not gargle Listerine had three times as many colds as those who gargled five times a day. The colds were four times as severe and lasted four times as long.

#### ***The secret—germicidal action with safety***

Because of Listerine's amazing germicidal action it kills germs in the fastest time accurately recorded by science. So it reduces mouth bacteria 98% or more, and maintains substantial reduction for hours.

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When you go into a drug store ask for Listerine and stop that you get it—and nothing else. Buy a bottle for your home and one for your office. Make a habit of gargling with it at least twice a day, and at the first sign of trouble increase the frequency of the gargle to from three to five times a day, and consult your physician. Lambert Pharmaceutical Co., St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.





*Father Albert gave a choking cry and fell forward, his hands grasping at nothingness.*

## The Black Mass

By Capt. S. P. Meek

**A** PIERCING scream broke the stillness of the night. A wild, eery cry it was, partly of pain, but mostly of sheer, stark terror. It rang through the corridors of the monastery of St. Sebastian in Malden, and woke the good brothers from their slumbers. Hastily

girding on his robe, Father Albert, the abbot, came forth from his cell to find the prior already in the corridor.

"What was that noise, Brother Anselm?" he asked.

The prior shook his head.

"I don't know, Father," he answered. "It woke me as it did you.

Even into a holy monastery reaches the foul Asmodeus and his devil's coven.

It sounded like one in the last extremity of suffering."

"Are all the brethren here?" asked the abbot, looking at the monks who were crowding into the corridor.

"Brother Simon!" cried the prior suddenly. "He is in the chapel."

"What is he doing there?"

"He is spending the night in prayer by my order, as a penance for failing to place the host before the altar last night."

A worried look came into the abbot's face.

"Such a matter should have been reported to me, Brother Anselm," he said. "Come, you and I will go to the chapel and learn whether he heard the cry. The rest will remain here."

Followed by the prior, Father Albert led the way to the chapel. He swung open the massive door which separated it from the sleeping quarters of the black-robed brethren, and peered within.

"Brother Simon!" he called softly.

Only silence answered him.

"I fear the worst," he said in an undertone.

The two heads of the monastery entered the chapel and glanced around. The room was empty. Brother Anselm pointed to an open door on the opposite side of the room.

"He may have gone out to seek the cause of the cry," he suggested.

The abbot nodded in assent. He led the way through the opened doorway into a vestibule, on the further side of which was another partially opened door. With the prior at his heels, he passed through the doorway into the streets of Malden.

HE gave a faint cry and recoiled in horror at the sight which met his gaze. Crumpled up on the concrete walk lay a black-

robed figure. It was doubled up as though it had writhed in supreme agony before being stilled forever. Most weird of all, and the thing which made the abbot cross himself and murmur the name of the monastery's patron saint, was the face of the prone figure. From it streamed a pale, unholy light. Long, phosphorescent streamers rose from it to waver for a moment in the faint breeze before dissipating their light into the darkness of the night. A faint, but none the less distinct, odor hung over the body. It was an odor in which the smell of burning sulphur was strangely mingled with that of raw blood.

"Brother Simon!" gasped the prior.

The abbot stepped back and closed an electric switch. A light set over the doorway sprang into brilliance. The two men bent over the prone figure. The prior's recognition had been accurate. It was the body of the ill-fated monk who had been spending the night in the chapel. His head was drawn far back and his features were convulsed in a horrible grimace. Every muscle was drawn tense and rigid. Father Albert bent over the body and opened the robe of the dead man. An ejaculation of horror broke from his lips. On the white flesh of the dead man's breast in livid lines, as though drawn with living fire, was a strange character: three T's joined to one another. From it more streamers of weird light, visible even in the light from the electric bulb, were rising and twining about one another.

The sound of feet told of the approach of other brethren. The abbot drew the robe over the dead monk's chest.

"Keep silent of this," he said in a shaken voice.

Brother Anselm nodded. A half dozen of the brothers emerged from

the monastery. As they saw the prone figure, exclamations of surprise and consternation rose from their lips.

"Keep silent!" said the prior sternly. "Take up the body of this brother and place it before the altar. There it shall lie for three days, as is our custom, before it is placed in consecrated ground. Father, shall one watch the balance of the night?"

"Let two watch and pray for the soul of our departed brother," replied the abbot. "Brother Anselm, come you to my cell. I desire counsel with you. Let the rest go to their cells for prayer and meditation."

**W**HEN the two heads of the monastery entered the cell of the abbot, Brother Albert dropped the ceremonious manner which he had been using.

"What do you make of it, Anselm?" he asked.

"I don't know, Father. You noticed the glow on his face and breast?"

"I did. Also I noticed the fetid odor about his body. Both the odor and the glow disappeared, or at least became less noticeable, when the body entered the sacred precincts of the chapel."

"Some electric phenomenon, I imagine."

"Electric nonsense! It's a clear night. Anyway, lightning wouldn't explain that mark on his breast."

"It does strange things sometimes, Father."

"It didn't make that mark. Didn't you recognize it?"

"No. What was it?"

"You should study the early history of the Church more carefully," replied the abbot. "That mark was the triple tau, the secret mark used by the worshippers of Asmodeus, the arch-fiend, to seal the hearts of the initiates of their

vile cult. Did you not tell me that there was no host before the altar this morning?"

"I did. It was the second night on which Brother Simon failed to place it there. That was why I gave him penance."

"Did he admit his negligence?"

"He denied it."

"He spoke the truth, and you punished him. Anselm, Anselm, you need a lesson of humility and to learn that your judgment is not infallible. Did you yourself see the host placed to-night?"

"I did."

"Yet, if you look now, there is none there. The host was stolen."

"But who—why—"

"By the followers of Asmodeus, and for only one possible purpose, for the celebration of the Black Mass."

"But the Devil's Mass was one of the superstitions of the dark ages," protested the prior. "That silly mummery and the superstition which kept it alive have both been dead for generations."

**A**NSELM," replied the abbot sternly, "you have studied too much in modern science and too little in church history. There are forces in the world which cannot be weighed in a balance or examined under a microscope. What you have termed a 'silly mummery' has been, and I fear, is, a very live and potent force for evil. The Black Mass was not, as some moderns try to say, a mere burlesque of the offering up of the Holy Sacrament. It was a very definite ritual of sin, portions of it having come down intact from the obscene orgies of ancient Babylon and the worship of Egypt. It has been in the world since time was, and it ever recurs, despite all efforts to stamp it out."

"Tell me more of it, Father," said the prior eagerly.

"It is a ritual of worship of evil incarnate, of the Fiend himself, or of one of his attendant demons. When the forces of evil are triumphant in a place, a coven of thirteen with a master is formed to celebrate it. The master is a high initiate of evil, a practiser of black magic. In a black chapel, with an inverted cross, the covens gather for worship, using the consecrated host which is stolen from before an altar. Even as God himself is present at the celebration of the Mass, so Satan, or one of his demons, is present at the Black Mass. He confers on his followers strange and awful powers. The werewolf, the ghoul, and the vampire, are only a few of the manifestations."

"But such things never existed!" cried the prior.

"**S**UCH things existed and *still* exist," declared the abbot sternly. "Fortunately, there are those highly placed who know. The worship of Asmodeus has been officially dead for many years, but it is known to the Church that the Devil's Mass has been regularly celebrated in the Basque Country of northwestern France. This is its first appearance on this continent since the Salem affairs that I know of, although I have heard rumors that in Pennsylvania, the Black Mass is occasionally celebrated. Such learning is hard to destroy, and harder to turn into the paths of righteousness."

"But be silent of this. Officially, Brother Simon died of apoplexy. See that his body remains before the altar and that none of the brethren are allowed to touch it in such a manner that they may see the mark. I am going to Boston to-morrow."

"To see—"

"Whom I please and on a secret mission. Meanwhile, cultivate hu-

mililty and study the works of Roger Bacon. Veiled in allegory as his writings are, one page contains a higher wisdom than all the volumes of the modern masters of science over whose pages you pore. From him, you may gain some inkling of the meaning of the things you have seen this night."

The prior bowed deeply. When Father Albert used that tone, there was no profit in further questions. He left the abbot's cell and visited the chapel to make sure that his superior's wishes were carried out.

**E**ARLY the next morning, the abbot entered the monastery's car and was driven into Boston and to the Archbishop's palace. He was admitted to immediate audience with His Eminence, the Cardinal Archbishop. An hour later he emerged from the palace and was driven to an office on Boylston Street. He took an elevator to the fifth floor and paused before a door bearing the legend: "Earnest Aloysius Catherton, M.D." He entered and gave his name to a nurse. In a few moments he was ushered into the famous nerve specialist's consulting room.

"Are you consulting me professionally, Father?" asked the doctor.

His low-pitched, kindly voice was out of all proportion to his frail body. It had a deep quality of resonance as though it would fill with ease a huge cathedral. His patients found great comfort in the timber of that voice. He raised a slim, white hand, a hand so small and shapely as to be almost feminine, and ran it through the thick black hair which rose above his tall forehead.

"Not exactly, Doctor. One of the brethren of St. Sebastian died last night under strange circumstances. I wish you to examine him, and tell me, if you can, the manner of his passing."

"If the man is dead, Father, the case is out of my province. If you suspect foul play, you should go to the police."

"They cannot help me, Doctor. I came to you at the instance of a certain high one who recently blessed at your request, three articles, one of which was a bar of virgin silver."

The doctor leaned forward, his eyes growing strangely darker.

"Ah, the Cardinal—"

"Let that high one be nameless, since such is his wish," interrupted the abbot. "Will you lend me your aid?"

For reply, Dr. Catherton touched a button on his desk.

"I am engaged for the balance of the day, Miss Troy," he said to the nurse who responded. "If anything comes up, get Blakeslee or Emerson. I will be back to-morrow."

"Yes, Doctor."

As the nurse left the room, the nerve specialist turned to his visitor.

"Tell me what happened," he said quietly.

**I**N a few well-chosen words, Father Albert drew a graphic picture of the events of the night before, omitting, however, all reference to the strange mark on Brother Simon's breast. The doctor removed his gold-rimmed glasses and nervously tapped his teeth with them, his pale blue eyes peering steadily at the black-robed figure before him. When the abbot told of the stolen host, the doctor drew in his breath with a sharp hiss.

"Mother of God!" he exclaimed. "Has it gone that far already?"

He sprang to his feet, grasping the abbot by the arm with a grip whose strength belied his frail appearance.

"Come!" he said tersely. "If the

host has been stolen, there is no time to lose. You can tell me the rest while we drive."

The abbot rose and followed him from the office. He finished his narrative while the doctor's car tore along the road to Malden. As the car drew up in front of the monastery, the doctor sprang out.

"Where is Brother Simon's body?" he demanded.

"In the chapel before the altar. It is a rule of our monastery that the body of a deceased brother shall lie there for three days before burial. This is to teach the brethren the uncertainty of life and the imminence of death."

"Lead the way."

Before the altar, Dr. Catherton started as his gaze fell on the dead man's distorted features.

"Send the others from the chapel, please," he said quietly.

At a word from the abbot, the two monks who were praying before the altar rose and glided noiselessly from the room. Dr. Catherton bent over the body and stared keenly at it.

"What have you given as the cause of death?" he asked.

"Apoplexy, Doctor."

"It will do. He died, however, of psychic shock; of terror, to put it bluntly. Were there any marks of violence on the body?"

**F**OR answer, the abbot opened the robe of the dead monk. Dr. Catherton staggered back as though he had been struck, at the sight of the sinister mark on the white flesh.

"The triple tau!" he cried, his voice vibrant with excitement and with more than a trace of horror. "The mark of Asmodeus! Mother of God, why must such things be allowed to be? Do you realize the significance of this mark, Father?"

"I have studied Roger Bacon," replied the abbot quietly.

"Then you know that a coven of the vilest cult of devil-worship that the world has ever known, the cult to which the infamous Giles de Rais belonged, has been formed, and that the Black Mass is again being sung?"

"I fear you are right. Doctor, is that mark the sign of an initiate or of a victim?"

Drawing a scalpel from his bag, Dr. Catherton bent over the body. As the knife touched the livid ear, a strange fetid odor rose on the air. A black stain came on the point of the shining blade, traveling slowly up toward the doctor's hand. From the lips of the dead man came a low wailing moan. The abbot crossed himself in horror, but the doctor, with trembling hands went on with his examination.

"It is fresh," he said as he rose. "It was put on at the moment of his death by some power above those that I know, the same power which now holds the body, and it may, the soul, in thrall. The secret knowledge of the adepts is loose again in the world."

"May the body be buried in consecrated ground?" asked the abbot.

"It may. Before us lies a martyr of the Church. To-night, let none watch the altar, nor approach it. You and I must watch alone. It is enough that two lives and two souls be imperiled, and the duty is ours. Now I must return home and arm myself with weapons. We must fight fire with fire and evil with evil's weapons."

A cloud gathered over the abbot's face.

"Are not the prayers of the Church weapons against evil?" he asked.

"They are, but we will need other aid. The weapons I will use will be blessed by that certain high one we both know."

The abbot bowed his head, his lips murmuring in prayer.

DR. CATHERTON entered his waiting car and was driven back toward Boston. He did not go to the city but was driven to a beautiful house set in spacious grounds on the outskirts of Cambridge. He entered the house and went straight to his library, the door of which he opened with a key which he drew from an inner pocket. As soon as he had entered, he locked the door and restored the key to its place.

The room was one which would have made the doctor's patient gasp. It was not the library of a modern doctor of medicine, but the laboratory of an initiate and alchemist of the middle ages. In cases which lined the walls were strange, massive volumes, bound in snakeskin, in ebony, in papyrus, and other strange materials. Over them hooded an aura of age and mystery as though they held secrets too high for the profane gaze of the uninstructed.

In the center of the room stood a brazier, flanked by two grinning human skulls. Over it, suspended on wires so fine as to be invisible in the dim light which pervaded the windowless room, swung a huge bat. On the draped walls were pictured suns, stars, and crescents. The crowning glory of the room was a huge crystal sphere, a full twelve inches in diameter, clear and colorless as water. Not a single flaw marred its absolute perfection. In it, the whole room shined in miniature, as though it floated in its limpid depths.

Dr. Catherton pressed a wall switch and a dim radiance flooded the room, concentrating in a beam of golden light which fell on a desk in one corner. He advanced to one of the wall cases, considered a moment, and then chose two

ponderous tomes which he carried to the desk. The first, bound in brown leather, was printed in heavy black-faced Latin type. The second was hand-inscribed in Hebraic characters.

THE doctor opened the two volumes and slowly translated certain passages. As he read, his face grew vacant and an aura of mystery hung over him, until it seemed that he was no longer in the room as a physical entity, but only as a disembodied wraith of some ancient learning. At times his lips moved as though he were in converse with unseen personalities in the room. Presently he moved to the wall case and drew forth a roll of papyrus, painted with tiny hieroglyphs.

"The Book of the Dead," he murmured almost inaudibly. "Even Eliphas Levi, the last of the adepts, and Rabbi ben Hermon are as children before the mighty wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian Thoth."

Holding the book to his breast, he tossed a handful of incense on the brazier. Clouds of aromatic smoke rose eddying into the quiet air. The doctor bent over the brazier, intoning a ritual in a long dead tongue. Beads of perspiration stood out on his head. The swirling eddies of smoke twisted and began to take nebulous form above his head. He raised his face toward them, still intoning the ancient ritual. The nebulous forms wavered for a moment and then dissipated into formless swirls. The doctor laid down the papyrus roll with a sigh.

"Not yet," he murmured. "The secrets of Mani Hotep, the Priest of Isis, are too well veiled for me to penetrate yet to their fullness. I must seek for aid elsewhere."

He replaced the papyrus roll reverently in its case and took down

a quarto volume, hand-written in Latin.

"It all comes back to Roger Bacon in the end," he said as he opened it. "Could I understand all that he has written in this volume, there is nothing more that I would ever need to know."

HE found the passage which he sought and read it over again and again.

"Much of it is veiled in allegory," he said with a sigh as he laid down the volume, "yet this have I learned. The Black Mass can be sung only by an adept who has passed through all the cycles and is the apotheosis of evil and wickedness. Such a one I must face this night. Since the stolen host is present, neither the master nor the inferior members of the coven will quail before the consecrated host, as they will ordinarily. The crucifix is powerless before the inverted cross hung above their blood-stained black altar.

"He names certain holy relics which have power, yet none of them are to be had. We must depend on the relic of St. Sebastian in the monastery, and he is silent about it. The only weapons he names which we have are water from the Jordan and oil of myrrh, each of which must be blessed by one who has never harbored heretical doubts and who has never been in mortal sin since baptism. I have those items, prepared against this day and blessed by one who is high, indeed. Whether he is sinless, this night will tell."

From a wall case he took two bottles which he placed in his pockets. Locking the door carefully behind him, he left the house and entered his car. At the monastery, he was taken directly to the abbot who welcomed him gravely.

"You have done as I requested, Father?" asked the doctor.

"I have. This is the first time since the founding of the monastery that the chapel has not been open to those who wished to worship."

"There is present in the chapel that which should not be worshipped. Let us make preparations for our vigil."

In the chapel, the doctor placed a screen to one side of the altar. From his pocket he took a bottle of clear amber fluid. He moistened the tip of his finger and drew a line of the liquid around each of the outer edges of the screen. In each panel, he marked a large cross.

"For our protection," he said to the abbot. "Nothing evil can pass that mark."

With his moistened finger he drew a circle on the floor around the screen and two chairs which he placed behind it. As a final measure, he touched his wrists, his breast over his heart, and his forehead, with the liquid. When he attempted to do the same thing to the abbot, Father Albert objected.

"The prayers of the Holy Church are the only protection I desire," he said shortly. "If they fail, I care not what happens."

Dr. Catherton shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope that my precautions are needless," he said, "yet they are the part of wisdom. If you will not be protected, be sure that you do not move out of the circle I have drawn. Now compose yourself for rest. We have a long wait before us."

THE hours passed slowly in the dimly lighted chapel. Father Albert had had little sleep the night before, and despite his feeling of tenseness, he caught himself drowsing. He came to with a start. Dr. Catherton had his finger pressed to his lips. The abbot

listened and his heart beat more rapidly as a faint wail like a distant wind sounded through the chapel. He peered out through the screen and an exclamation almost hurst unbidden from his lips.

About the body of Brother Simon a lambent blue flame was playing. It glowed brilliantly for a moment and then grew murky and dull, as though an evil force and a good were warring for supremacy. Gradually the brightness of the flame died and a murky red glow took its place. Phosphorescent streamers rose from the dead monk's chest and formed themselves in the air into the sinister emblem of the triple tau. The hier creaked. Father Albert's scalp tingled as the body rose to a sitting posture and then slid off the hier and stood on its feet.

With head drawn back and unseeing eyes, the dead monk walked slowly up the steps to the altar. His hand reached out for the host, but he drew it back as though the consecrated wafer had stung him. The wailing sound came louder and the hand again went forward. This time it grasped the host. Carrying the wafer, the body walked down the steps and across the chapel. Dr. Catherton pressed the abbot's arm as a signal to remain quiet, and rose to his feet and followed. Despite the doctor's warning, Father Albert followed him, his lips moving in prayer.

STRAIGHT across the chapel the dead monk moved. His hand went forth and opened the door which led to the street. As he stepped forth from the monastery, the doctor and the abbot were only a step behind. On the walk stood a cloaked figure who reached out a hand for the host. The monk extended it toward him. As his hand closed on it, Father Albert gave a cry. Pushing the doctor



aside, he sprang at the stranger.

With a cry of dismay, Dr. Catherton strove to place his body between the abbot and the stranger. He was too late. The stranger stretched forth his hand toward the abbot. From it came a flash of lurid flame. Father Albert gave a choking cry and fell forward, his hands grasping at nothingness. Over his face and breast played a strange phosphorescent glow.

The stranger turned toward the doctor. Again the flame shot forth from his hand. It enveloped the doctor's form but rebounded harmlessly. With a cry of rage, the stranger sprang forward. As his hand reached out to grasp the doctor, his foot struck the body of Brother Simon, which had fallen as soon as the host had left its hand. He staggered for a moment and then fell headlong. Dr. Catherton dashed forward with a bottle of clear liquid in his hand. He dashed a portion of the contents on the prostrate form of the stranger. It hissed, and flames shot up into the air. With a howl of pain and rage, he rose to his feet and fled away into the night.

THE doctor now turned his attention to the fallen abbot. He still moved feebly, his hands clawing at the ground and the strange flame playing over him. Dr. Catherton poured a few drops of liquid from his bottle into his hand and smeared it on the abbot's face. The flame was instantly extinguished. Quickly the doctor sprinkled the rest of the contents of the bottle over him. The abbot's convulsive movements ceased. Slowly his head, which had been drawn back, came forward to a normal position, and he groaned feebly.

A sound of running feet came from the interior of the monastery. The doctor stepped back into the chapel.

"Stop!" he cried as the first of the monks came into sight. "Where is the prior?"

Brother Anselm stepped forward.

"Bid the brethren to remain where they are until you go outside and learn the wishes of your abbot," said the doctor.

The prior followed him through the door. He gave a cry of dismay as his gaze fell on the prostrate form of the abbot. The doctor bent forward and spoke slowly and distinctly.

"Can you hear me, Father?" he asked.

The abbot groaned slightly and nodded.

"Your prior is here to receive your orders," the doctor went on. "Don't try to speak. Nod if you approve the orders which I give. All of the brethren are to retire to their cells and remain there in prayer until they are summoned. Brother Anselm and I will carry you to your cell."

The abbot nodded.

"Such is my will," came faintly from his lips.

The prior bowed and stepped back into the chapel. He returned in a moment.

"The brethren are dismissed to their cells," he said.

"Then help me bear the body of Brother Simon back to its place before the altar," said the doctor.

THE two men picked up the body of the dead monk and replaced it on the bier from which it had risen a few minutes before. They raised the groaning abbot and bore him tenderly to his cell. Dr. Catherton opened his black bag and took out a hypodermic syringe. In a few moments a flush came on the abbot's chalky face and he strove to sit up.

"Remain quiet, Father," said the doctor soothingly. "You will be stronger in a few minutes. May

"I still give orders in your name?"

"Brother Anselm," said the abbot in a stronger voice, "obey the doctor's orders as though they were my own."

The prior crossed his arms and bowed deeply.

"Have all of the brethren of the monastery enter this room singly," said the doctor. "Warn them that they are to say farewell to their abbot, who is near death. Open his robe so that they may see his chest."

Hesitatingly the prior stepped to the abbot and opened his robe. He recoiled in horror at what he saw. Branded on the white flesh in livid lines, was the sign of the triple tau. The sign gleamed with a dull light of its own. From the abbot rose an odor of evil, an odor reminiscent of burning sulphur and of raw blood.

"Obey my orders and ask no questions!" said the doctor sharply.

The prior composed his face with an effort and left the cell. One by one, the monks entered. The abbot lay with closed eyes. Each monk, with a word of prayer, and many with a falling tear—and some with a glance of mild bewilderment at the strange mark—gazed on his prostrate form and left the cell.

The tenth man to enter gave a sudden start as his gaze fell on the fatal mark. Involuntarily his right hand went up in a peculiar gesture. Hardly had he made the motion than the doctor had him by the arm with a grip of steel.

"Close the door!" he cried to the prior.

THE monk's face grew livid and he strove to wriggle from the doctor's grasp. The doctor held him fast and turning him about, glared intently into his eyes. The doctor's eyes were so dark as

to appear almost black, and they glittered with a strange intensity. The monk struggled against their hypnotic power but he was helpless. His struggles ceased and he gazed as if fascinated. Without letting his gaze waver, the doctor drew a small crystal from his pocket. He waved it back and forth between his face and the monk's and finally brought it to rest before the monk's eyes. Slowly he withdrew his eyes, leaving the monk's gaze riveted on the crystal. The doctor set it on a table and the monk's eyes followed it.

"What is this man's name?" asked the doctor in an undertone.

"Brother Clement," replied the prior.

The doctor's sonorous voice boomed out, filling the cell with a roar of sound.

"Brother Clement," he said impressively, "you will hear, answer, and obey me."

"I will hear, answer, and obey," came the answer in a toneless voice.

"Open your robe."

The monk threw open his black robe. On his chest was branded the mark of the triple tau.

"Who, besides yourself, is so marked in this monastery?" asked the doctor.

"No one."

"Have others been sought as initiates?"

"None as yet."

"Who is master of your covenant?"

The monk hesitated, but the doctor's voice repeated the question in a tone which admitted of no evasion.

"Asmodeus," came the answer.

"He is the titular master, of course. Who is the virtual master?"

"Asmodeus, himself."

"Mother of God!" murmured the doctor under his breath. The monk shuddered.

"Where is your chapel?"

"I cannot tell. Before my lips could form the words, I would lie dead at your feet."

"Then you must lead us to it."

"Then I must lead you to it," was the answer in a dull monotone.

"When will the Black Mass again be celebrated?"

"This night, at the hour of dawn."

"Can we reach there in time?"

"Yes."

"Then lead and I will follow."

THE monk turned like an automaton and started toward the door. Father Albert staggered to his feet.

The monk stopped in his stride. Dr. Catherton and the prior looked inquiringly at the ashen-faced abbot.

"This concerns my monastery," said Father Albert. "I will go with you."

"You can't," replied the doctor. "Your condition admits of no such excitement."

"Nevertheless, I will go," said the abbot positively. "If my soul is called from this world, it will be of little moment. I cannot live, shirking my duty."

"He will go, Doctor," said the prior in an undertone. "I know that tone."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He drew a stethoscope from his bag and applied it to the abbot's chest.

"If you go," he said quietly, "I will not be responsible for your life. At least, let me protect you as I am protected."

He drew the bottle of amber liquid from his coat pocket. The abbot looked at it questioningly.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Oil of myrrh," replied the doctor. "It was one of three things blessed together by a high one who is free from sin. One was a bottle

of water from the Jordan which saved your life this night, one was a bar of silver, and this is the third."

"Then apply it in the name of the Holy Trinity!" cried the abbot.

Dr. Catherton moistened his finger with the precious substance and marked a cross on the abbot's breast over his heart, on his wrists, and on his forehead. Brother Anselm gave a cry of astonishment as the oil was applied to his superior's breast. Where the holy oil touched the mark of the triple tau, the livid scar faded and became invisible.

Father Albert drew his robe around him and turned to the doctor.

"I am ready," he announced.

AT a word from the doctor, Brother Clement moved forward through the door of the abbot's cell and along the corridor which led to the monastery entrance. Outside the building he paused.

"It will be necessary to drive," he said tonelessly. "The chapel is many miles from here."

At a word from the abbot, the prior darted off to get the monastery's car. When it was brought around, Dr. Catherton slid into the driver's seat, the hypnotized monk beside him. The car moved off through the night toward the ocean. North along the shore they drove toward Nahant. Presently the doctor swung the car off into a side road, rugged and uneven. He drove for over a mile before he stopped the car.

The three men got out. With the monk leading the way, they crossed a field toward a rocky escarpment, beyond which could be heard the sea. They climbed the rocky wall and looked down on the turbulent ocean far below them.

The sea wall looked to be too rough for climbing, but the monk went forward and started the descent. The path proved to be practicable. They climbed down until they were below the high tide mark on the cliff. The monk turned to his left and disappeared.

"It is here, Father," whispered Dr. Catherton in an undertone of great excitement.

The abbot nodded and followed him into a cave in the face of the rock. It was dark at the mouth, but from around a bend a few feet from them, came a murky red glow. The bottom of the cave sloped upward sharply. From ahead and above them, the black figure of Brother Clement was just disappearing around the curve.

WITH an exclamation of consternation, the doctor ran forward, the abbot at his heels. They scrambled up the sharp slope and rounded the curve. Before them in the rocky cave was a chapel, but such a chapel as neither of them had ever seen before. The walls were draped with black, with here and there the emblem of the triple tau marked in dull, murky red. On the far side was a black-draped altar behind which rose a huge inverted cross. Instead of the figure of the Man of Calvary, pinioned on the cross was the naked body of a young girl, partially disemboweled. On either side of the altar were hideously obscene statues. The abbot shuddered and crossed himself at the sight of them. Over all played a lurid red flame, emerging from braziers set around the cavern.

Before the altar stood a crimson-robed figure, his hands raised in a grim travesty of a pontifical blessing. On the floor knelt eleven black-clad figures, in silent adoration of the abominations displayed before them. The high priest of

diabolism raised his head at Brother Clement's entrance. He extended one claw-like hand toward him and a pale red flame flickered from his fingers.

"You are late!" he cried to the renegade monk, in a voice whose tone reminded the abbot of the hissing of a serpent.

Brother Clement stood motionless under the spell which the doctor's hypnotic powers had thrown over him. The priest took a step forward, but paused as the figures of Dr. Catherton and the abbot came into view.

"Up!" he hissed to the kneeling worshippers. "Here are voluntary sacrifices!"

The kneeling initiates sprang to their feet and faced the intruders. A low intense growl of bestial rage came from them. Slowly and menacingly they began to move forward.

"Stop!" boomed out the doctor's resonant voice. "Unless you wish to join your Grand Master in his regions of torment, pause before you dare to attack us."

FOR a moment, the black-clad figures paused. At a cry from the priest, they flung themselves forward. With a single motion, the doctor swung the aged abbot behind him. From the breast of his coat he drew a thin gold case elaborately carved and surmounted by a tiny crucifix. He held the case out before him. At the sight of the sacred relic of St. Sebastian, the initiates paused irresolutely. The doctor made a step forward, holding out the relic, and crying in a loud voice a long-forgotten exorcism in medieval Latin.

The initiates retreated before his steady advance, but the high priest came forward from the altar, a horrible grin showing on his dark face. He stretched out his hand toward the doctor. From it came a bolt of

lurid red flame. It leaped through the air like a sword and enveloped the figures of the doctor and the Abbot. The priest dropped his hand and watched to see his victims fall. An expression of amazement replaced the grin as he saw the doctor keeping up his steady advance, his sonorous voice rolling out the Latin phrases of the exorcism.

The priest gave a cry of baffled rage and again extended his hand. The red flame rushed out and filled the end of the chapel. The form of the renegade Brother Clement was near enough to receive a portion of the fire. He fell, screaming horribly, his hands grasping at the air, and his head drawn back. Neither the doctor nor the abbot were affected. With a bestial scream, the priest leaped forward through the flames, his claw-like hands outstretched to grasp his victims.

Dr. Catherton thrust the gold case containing the holy relic into his pocket and took out the bottle of amber-colored liquid. He drew the cork and waited. As the priest grasped him with talon-like fingers, he dashed the holy oil of myrrh full into his saturnine, diabolical face.

**A** HORRIBLE scream of pain and disappointed rage came from the priest. He swayed for a moment, and then fell forward. From his prone body, a shape of terror, outlined in lurid red flame, rose into the air. It hovered for a moment over the body. Tearing itself loose, it sped about the chapel, touching object after object of the horrible paraphernalia of devil-worship. Each object that it touched crumpled and fell in a pile of ashes.

The Initiates had watched their

leader with hope and with confidence until he fell. When the shape of flame arose, with despairing walls, they fled the cave.

The flame approached and hovered for a moment over Dr. Catherton and the abbot, striving to reach them with its destroying touch. All its efforts were unavailing. With a final wail of rage and despair, it fled from the cave into the outer air.

Dr. Catherton bent over the form of Brother Clement, beside whom the kneeling abbot was telling his beads.

"He has joined his Grand Master," he said after a brief examination. "It is well that he has done so. He spoke truth when he said that Asmodeus himself was virtual master of this coven. We have robbed him of his earthly body, and God grant that it be long before he gets another."

"But you have invaded their place of worship and destroyed their leader," exclaimed the abbot. "Is there more to be done?"

"There were twelve besides Asmodeus himself in this coven," replied the doctor, "and but one of them has been destroyed. I know not how far into the secrets of evil the others have penetrated, but we must hunt them down, one by one, and destroy them. The lore of the adepts has been lost, save to an instructed few, and modern science is too blind to admit that such things can be. Father, you and I must wage a lone battle against them with the aid of that high one who is without sin, yet who was wise enough to bless our weapons. Those things and our books are our only weapons. God grant us final victory."

"Amen!" said the abbot reverently.





*Slowly, stiffly, Blaikie sagged backwards.*

## Webbed Hands

By Ferdinand Berthoud

**I**T was shortly after three that morning when the drowsy policeman found her. The bright African moon threw clear-cut shadows, and the man stumbled into her before he knew she was there. In

Town's most fashionable suburb, a woman lying rigid under a tree at that time of night was something quite out of the ordinary.

The policeman winced, then drew back and pushed the woman gently with his foot. A Cape half-

"... As with the others, her wrists bore the token of a savage hold. . . ."

casts, loaded with brandy, she was bound to be. But the woman made no response to the policeman's prodding.

More puzzled, the man now took his old-fashioned lamp and twisted it and held it close above her. Disgustingly he flashed it over her from head to foot, then back again. The light at last stopped, and shone full on the face. The eyes were wide open, staring; uncannily staring. But the woman obviously was dead. And the woman was white, and distinctly respectable.

At that time of night no traffic at all went along that secluded road, and the officer left her as she was without fear of her being further molested, and reached the station half a mile away.

A SERGEANT, a doctor and a couple of plain-clothes men returned with him. Careful as possible not to obliterate tracks the doctor stood close to the woman and stooped to examine her. No signs of violence or any struggle were there, yet the face and eyes told of indescribable terror. Guided by the lights of the lanterns the doctor examined her for broken bones and searched for traces of blood, but without result. Then the doctor took the stiffening wrists. The next instant he was standing straight and serious.

"The zoo," he said. "The open air zoo up at Groote Schuur. Some dangerous beast has escaped, and still must be at large."

In the sharp shadows cast by the trees the men all suddenly looked about them. Then, following the doctor's pointing finger, they came back to the ghastly business at their feet. The finger indicated the woman's wrists, and traced around them. Each plain-clothes man holding one of her hands, the officer turned his light onto them. The wrists had been gripped by some-

thing with tremendous strength, and still held deep purple marks.

"Some kind of ape," the doctor decided. "Too big to be any baboon, and a baboon wouldn't have quite such terrible power. And I don't really see how she was killed, or if she was killed, except by fear."

The sergeant leaned close, too, and for several minutes scanned one of the wrists intently. He then called for a light to be held beneath it; he examined the marks intently, and at last shook his head with great finality.

"I know every animal up at Groote Schuur better than I know you, Doctor," he declared, "and I was born in up-country Africa and have been tens of thousands of miles through it. There's no ape or other kind of animal could make those finger prints. There's no African animal with webbed hands."

THERE was an awed silence as one after another each man took careful stock of the dark purple marks. Undoubtedly they were bruises. Each finger, bone for bone, was distinctly traced, but the fingers were connected nearly to their tips with closely woven nets. The hands that had made these marks were webbed as the feet of a duck or, perhaps, as those of a frog.

"No," the doctor admitted presently, and there was a shudder in his voice. "Those hands certainly do not belong to any animal, and they most emphatically don't appear to belong to any human being. What mysterious thing can have done it—and why?"

The sergeant looked the other directly in the eyes. "I don't know, Doctor. I told you I'd been tens of thousands of miles in this old Africa of ours. I have seen and heard much, and I've found there are many things old Africa never will tell."

The doctor nodded slowly. "And I expect she won't tell us this either, eh?"

Dawn was but two hours away, and any investigation might destroy rather than produce evidence. The ground mostly was strewn with dead leaves, and looking for footprints was out of the question. Moving the woman, too, before daylight, might only mutilate some clue, and, as she most assuredly was past all aid, it was best to leave her where she was. Together, but at a slight distance away, the officer and the two plainclothes men arranged to stay and guard her.

The inquiry that morning led to nothing, save horror and disgust. The dead woman was a Miss Van Rooyen, a lady of but twenty-six, with no known enemies, involved in no love affair and quite contented with life; a woman of no occupation, living at home and of the upper middle class. An autopsy showed no injuries or signs of poison, and the verdict was as her staring eyes had indicated—she had died of fright.

Yet a check-up of the denizens of the huge zoo which runs along the side of Table Mountain showed every animal to be exactly where it was expected, and the fallen leaves where the body was found held no track of any approaching or departing assailant. For a week Cape Town, a city where murders and mysteries are few, shuddered and wondered, then gradually strove to forget.

AT the end of the second week following a man named Martin, coming up over the Kloof from Camp's Bay close to midnight, noticed what he took to be an animal crouching at the side of the road. Camp's Bay was a small pleasure-beach suburb of Camp Town, and at least eight miles from Ronde-

bosch and any zoo, and that didn't seem right. What was more the animal wasn't about when he had come over earlier in daylight, and its very stillness was disconcerting.

The man, for safety's sake, kept on for a while after he had passed it, then stopped and peered at it in the gloom. To all appearances it hadn't moved and didn't intend to molest him, so, gaining courage, he threw a stone at it. No answering growl or movement came.

More from curiosity than anything else Martin went cautiously back to investigate what had scared him and, with a lighted match, slowly approached it. A rock which had become loosened and had rolled from Devil's Peak, it now looked to be.

With a fresh match he bent and gazed down at it, then jumped back with a startled gasp. A woman, stretched flat on her back, was lying there, with open eyes staring straight toward the skies.

For an instant the man scarcely grasped it, then looked more closely at the face. No flicker was visible, no sign of life whatever.

EXCITEDLY Martin chased back down the mountain road and hunted up the only policeman the suburb possessed. With an hotel man who was late retiring they hastened up the twisting track to where it became nearly lost in the murk of trees. There, just as Martin had left it, was the stark, cold body of the woman.

A hasty examination told just what they all expected, for the other horror at once flashed to their minds. In the light of the policeman's lamp the three looked expectantly at the wrists, and neither had much to say.

Each wrist bore the deep purple impress of a cruel grip tight almost as any vise, and the separate bones of every finger were distinct.



The fingers, as easily seen, were joined together by webbing. This might have been the work of a human duck or an enormous frog.

As before, the woman was cold and past all aid, and Martin and the policeman decided to stay with her till daylight. But the light of dawn disclosed no clues; there were no significant footmarks, and no signs of any struggle were to be found.

And the autopsy was as unsuccessful as the previous one. Barring the gruesomely apparent, vicious grip-holds the body bore no evidences of violence whatsoever. The woman, a Miss Coetzee, in her late twenties, was well known and respected and, to all indications, quite satisfied with life. The purple marks gave a denial to suicide, the staring eyes shouted only "fear." That was all that the dead girl's body could say.

The sensation this time lasted much longer, for in a district where there are lonely wooded lanes and roads people sprinkle those spots with wraiths and ghouls, but in that happy, sunny clime the terror at length wore off. Soon life took up its usual course once more.

**A** STABLE attendant at the Wynberg race course, getting off an early train from Cape Town, in the dark took a short cut from the station. The attendant was somewhat drunk and wanted to get to bed.

At a cross roads a couple of hundred yards from the course in passing under trees the boy tripped and stumbled over something, and, in his muddled condition, staggered and trotted a dozen feet or so before he could regain his balance. The obstacle in the shadow looked solid and bulky, and he struck a match and leaned over it to get a fuller view. Two bulging,

staring eyes, now dead but still evincing terror, gleamed up at him.

The boy let out a howl, and the next instant was rushing away as one demented, for from the eyes his gaze had shot down along two arms, and had glimpsed two swollen, purple wrists.

There was no one there on guard, of course, when the boy and the police arrived, but it didn't matter, for when daylight came there was still the same lack of evidence; just a woman lying cold and stiff.

All Cape Town now was aroused, and the sensation became country-wide. The lack of success in accounting for the first two deaths and in bringing anyone or anything to account for either was intensified by the failure in the third, and for weeks on end no woman under thirty would venture anywhere except in full daylight and where there was a crowd.

This last one was a Miss de Wet, of but twenty-five and without love troubles or any known worry, and the risk was too staggering for any other such ladies to assume.

**T**HE deaths from fear still were a common topic of conversation well on into February, but the African woman is no continual coward. Soon one by one they strolled out again of an evening in the glorious sub-tropical short dusk. The past terror eventually was difficult to imagine—until one night a panting, blubbing native boy came running in, and the terror instantly took on a touch of the supernatural.

The police found the pitiful woman as the native had reported, and, as with the others, her eyes were open and bulged in their sockets. The wrists, straight down at her sides, bore the same token of a savage hold, but, as one of the investigators before had insisted, they led to one certain definite conclusion.

The thing in each case had instantly frightened the life out of the woman as she stood, and then had laid her gently down. An animal wouldn't do it, no human being could do it. What else could carry such unfathomable, uncontrollable fear?

The fifth woman was found three weeks later, and the sixth, another Miss Van Rooyan, at the end of a further month. Then a circumstance, quite apparent, but never before laid stress on, suddenly flashed in front of the African world.

All six women had been either closely or distantly related. Who or what in their families or hating their families could take such vindictive toll?

A TALL, dark, shadowy thing passed a Hottentot woman, and almost touched her in its hurry. The thing made no sound as it ran, and the eeriness made her turn and stare after it. A hundred yards back the shadow was still more flimsy, but two glowing, piercing, flaming eyes peered toward and through her.

The Hottentot screamed and ran, then cut through the trees on the Camp Ground. Next moment she was flat on her face, but the screaming didn't stop for a second. By the body of the seventh victim of fear she collapsed and, until rescued, used all the power of lung that the bush had given her. But she never could describe what she had seen.

This seventh, a Miss Helen Blaikie, and again a relative of the others, at once was claimed by her startled, sorrowing parents, but held by the police while her elder brother could be communicated with. The brother, Langford Blaikie, though living alone and isolated as any hermit, had long since established himself as the

director of family affairs, and the parents, now aging, had become accustomed to looking to him for everything. At the moment Langford happened to be two days distance away up-country in Johannesburg. On his arrival the body was handed over to him without any comment whatever other than an expression of condolence, and was buried as just another of Africa's unexplainable tragedies.

A week after the girl had been consigned to her grave, and after having taken care of all expenses, Langford Blaikie made application for the amount of his sister's insurance. The policy was for three thousand, five hundred pounds, and was signed over to him. The insurance company, knowing every incident of the young woman's murder and knowing the relationship, made payment without any demur. Then the check was paid into the bank.

A ledger clerk in the Standard Bank, holding the check in his hand and having been unduly interested in the sequence of grisly mysteries, happened that day to be in the humor to think. The clerk looked at a list of dates on a sheet of paper taken from his pocket, then checked the dates up with the account in front of him. The dates approximately tallied. This was the seventh unsolved ghostly murder, and the seventh insurance check which had been paid in, while each check had been issued by a different insurance company. The clerk held his breath, and his eyes narrowed.

THE ledger clerk sought the bank manager, and put the matter before him. The manager had an idea, too, that the coincidences needed explaining. At the police station, though not formally arrested or even charged or threatened, Langford Blaikie was

asked a few pointed questions. Never, however, was a man more willing, in so far as he could, to tell anything they wished to know.

It was quite correct, he admitted, that he had held policies on the lives of each of the seven women who had met their deaths by some unknown means. He always had had spare money, and was willing to help any of his relatives, no matter how distant. That was the reason for the policies. In each case he had lent money to the deceased, and the policies had been taken out and signed over to him as security. The women had signed them over to him voluntarily.

A quiet gentleman standing by asked sardonically if any women still living had given him their policies.

To the ready reply that three women had done so, the caustic bystander remarked, "They'll need more than insurance policies to take care of them now." Blaikle made no retort whatever. Anyone not knowing the facts of the case might have considered Blaikle as some philanthropist eager to help a good cause.

Yes, he had been trading and traveling in Central Africa for a number of years, Blaikle explained, but now had settled on his tiny farm and was leading a retired life. Occasionally he did a little business and speculating, but always in the Transvaal or other parts far away. No, he could give no reason for the murders, in fact he hadn't had full particulars of all of them, for in every case when they occurred he was a thousand or more miles from Cape Town. This, as it happened, he easily and conclusively could prove.

The sardonic man had a leading query: had he been the one to first approach the women on the money question, or had they approached him? Without an instant's

falter Blaikle admitted that it was his own idea. That one of the Miss Van Rooyens had spoken to him of her wish to take up art, and of her financial leanness, and that he'd then suggested the loan and the policy to secure it, and had told her that he'd do the same for any other of his friends. The others had approached him.

THE inquiry seemed as though it could progress no further, for the man had the women's notes and agreements; then the sardonic man asked another question: Why, when the dead women had borrowed comparatively small sums, had he kept the whole of the amount they were insured for—always three thousand or three thousand, five hundred pounds?

Beaming, Langford Blaikle enlightened him. He had paid their premiums for them, therefore the entire sum was his.

The other then fired his final shot. Wouldn't it be safer for the surviving three of Langford's debtors if they had their policies canceled?

Blaikle smiled indulgently, but shook his head.

The questioning came to a finish, with nothing worth while gained. With most men Blaikle's ready, pleasant answers served their purpose, but to the sardonic one and a watching detective they but shouted guilty knowledge. Any actual sorrow at the loss of a sister or other relatives was utterly lacking, while his brazen insistence on carrying all business through to the end gave evidence of utter callousness. The man was cognizant of every detail of the crimes and behind them. There was no doubt of that.

Then five weeks later the eighth dead woman with purple wrists and wildly staring eyes was found on a lonely lane.

**B**LAIKIE came back from another trip to Johannesburg and, casually and coolly made claim for payment of the insurance. Settlement this time, however, was flatly refused. Later that day the detective who had silently watched and the sardonic one paid him an informal visit at his farm, and, suave and bland as anyone would be to the closest of cronies, he cordially welcomed them. Though the conversation was harshly pointed Blaikie carried on as if he were discussing ordinary topics of the day.

The next morning he was arrested on the tentative charge of conspiracy, booked and put into jail. But even then he only protested at the hurt to his feelings and dignity, spoke of actions for criminal libel, and laughed at any fear of further trouble.

Three days later he applied for release on bail and, as the charge at bottom was little better than bluff, was released on a cash bond of two thousand pounds.

The sardonic man smiled as Blaikie left for his farm.

**T**HE tall, overcoated, gloved man opened the door of Blaikie's gloomy house and walked boldly in out of the dark. The house was silent, the message had said all servants would be away.

The man stepped in and, in the glow from an oil lamp, his yellow-brown face appeared expressionless and stolid. Somewhat flat and dull, it seemed, and unwrinkled, with a slightly beaklike nose. Blaikie rose from a chair, but he did not offer to shake hands.

"Hello, Trundle," he said. "You got my note, eh?"

The other answered, "Of course I did, or I wouldn't be here. And you wouldn't have risked sending it unless there was trouble. What is it?"

"Sit down," Blaikie suggested. "Take your coat off, and sit down."

The tall man still stood, expressionless. "What is it?" he repeated, doggedly. "What is it?"

Blaikie took a step and was close to him, and looked him straight in the eyes, then jerked his head away. "No, Trundle, there isn't trouble—yet. Sit down. Be comfortable."

The man had removed his gloves, and a hand shot out like a talon. The hand gripped Blaikie's arm, and drew him up so that their faces almost touched.

"You lie, you rat!" Trundle grated. "You've turned jackal. You want to turn traitor on me."

Blaikie looked again at the face before him, then held his head to one side. The man's eyes were half closed, but they pierced like snake rapiers, and their venomous flash hypnotized and dazed Blaikie.

"I haven't," he asserted. "I just want to talk to you. I want to discuss the future. Sit down."

The unlined skin now had changed, and was flickering and working as would the cheeks of some demoniac, fantastic monkey in a dream, the mouth gibbered as in pantomime, and the wide-drawn, open lips showed long yellow teeth between pointed tiger-like fangs.

"You lie! You've planted listeners. You lie!"

Still looking away, Blaikie made a vigorous effort and tore himself free.

"Would I set a trap for my own self to fall into?" he asked.

"You'd do anything, you coward! You rat!"

**B**LAIKIE slumped back into his chair, while the other stood silent and glowering. Trundle's eyes alternately flashed brighter and dimmer as the pulsing light of a glowworm's or firefly's tail.

For a scant moment Blaikia's mind shot back into the far interior of the continent, and to the swampy shores of Lake Mqobo. To the day when he'd seen Trundle, naked, filthy and savage, seize a native boy and hold him and peer at him until he dropped dead.

"I've got to do something now," Blaikia said, at last.

The other stayed just where he was. "You mean you think these people know more than you imagined? You mean you want to get out and away?"

"No," Blaikia corrected. "I mean you've got to go away."

Trundle's face came to a grin, and the grin was that of a demon. "Why me, when they don't know me and you're the only one they know of who has gained?"

"Why you? Because you can slip out of it without hurting yourself, of course," Blaikia told him. "The thing's come to an end, Trundle, and you can go back whence I brought you without risk. You've done your share."

"And supposing I don't choose to go back?" the grinning one rasped.

Again in a forced lull Blaikia's mind flashed in memory to the place of their meeting, to the scheme which that meeting had conjured up. A vindictive, dirty, brown savage who didn't seem human and couldn't be human, this man was then, one who lived in the swamps, and who, in water, was like a fish. Yet he spoke English and could read and write. He must in some part be an ordinary being.

The man had told Blaikia that his father had been a renegade English promoter and stockbroker, a man who'd committed crime on vile crime and then had vanished alone into the center of Africa to escape vengeance and justice. A brutally vicious man, that father must have been. Yet as a hobby

he'd been a teacher to this thing!

And of his mother? There was no wife when the man had first come to Africa, and her disappearance and the curse of it were part of his coming. "I never knew who my mother was," Trundle admitted; "or what."

THE eyes staring at Blaikia at last burned, and he came suddenly to the present. The thing before him now appeared as fatal as it must have to the boy he had seen him kill.

"You will go, Trundle. I've arranged it all. There's my bank balance; look at it; and I've drawn out an exact half. I want you to write and sign a confession taking every murder and the planning of every murder wholly on your shoulders, then take this half and the first train north."

"What?" came a shout, that sent a shudder along Blaikia's spine.

Blaikia opened a drawer in the table near him and pulled out a bundle of notes and a sheet of paper. He tossed the notes over to his visitor.

"They know I brought you down here two years ago, Trundle," he said, inwardly shivering, "but they lost track of you long since. Now I want you either to go back into the bush or into Portuguese territory where there's no extradition, or to Madagascar. You rewrite this confession, and two days after you leave I'll send it to a friend and get it posted back to me as from you on the way. That'll end all trouble for us both."

"Suppose I make you the one to go?" the other said, quietly.

"I've thought of that argument," Blaikia informed him. "I've prepared for it." Then of a sudden his fear completely disappeared.

Trundle looked into the muzzle of the revolver which was pointed at him, and at the eyes which were

close behind it. The glare which the fierce eyes held was as baneful as that of his own.

"TAKE that pen, Trundle," Blaikie ordered, "and sit down and write. You'll notice I make you say that for some personal injury I did you you've come to hate me, and have been wreaking vengeance by destroying all my friends. That's a telling start, isn't it? Over to your right here, behind you, is a small safe built into the wall at the back of a picture. Inside it are photos of you that I took when first I found you running naked. The confession will go into it with the photos until the time you are safely away. Only I know the combination or situation of the safe. Don't you think that's a certain and clever scheme to clear myself?"

"Yes," Trundle agreed, through lips in a face which was unearthly. "And part of it's true. I wish I could make you feel what deadly hate really means."

"Write!" Blaikie said, again.

A hand came high in the air, and opened up like a rubber fan. The savage, demon-like features quivered and knotted, and the open lips twitched round yammering teeth. The man made a single step forward, and his left hand gripped the bundle of notes as if to throw them. For an instant he held them, then dropped them into a pocket.

"All right," he consented. "I'll go. Yes, I'll go—but where I go you'll come with me."

"Will I?" Blaikie asked.

For minutes the man sat and wrote, while his left hand, steadying the copy, opened and closed like a leathery pulse. The confession was finished and signed. Trundle stood up.

"There you are," he announced. "There's your death warrant, Blaikie. And I won't say good-by."

"No need," the other countered, with grim intent.

The man slowly backed to the closed door, his narrowed eyes glinting like polished steel. The yammering mouth now was firm and set, yet the cheeks carried knife-like lines. A hand, fumbling at his back, felt for the door knob, and touched it.

"A death warrant," he repeated, turning to leave.

Then a bullet souged into him from behind, and without a murmur he crashed to the floor.

A SMILE spread over Blaikie's bronzed, forty-year-old face, and, calm and satisfied, he slid the revolver back into a drawer. Deliberately he walked over to the awful thing, and for a second stood looking down. In his mind he went over the perfection of his plans, even to the spare sheets of linoleum he had placed at the door to avoid the washing-out of blood-stains on carpet or boards. More inquisitively he leaned over to inspect his work. There was his money! What an expert job!

Blaikie stooped and gripped the dead man's coat with the intention of turning the corpse over. With a gasp and as though bitten by a snake he jumped back. The body had fallen with the thud of an ordinary heavy man, but now there was nothing but clothing covering an empty skin.

Where there should have been blood was but a trickle as of white glue.

Shuddering, almost to nausea, Blaikie collapsed backwards and sat and held onto the edge of the table. Sudden fear of something further he didn't understand throttled him, and he stared with terror-stricken eyes. Alive, he could argue and fence with a thing which was partly man, but the ghastly, limp, leathery empty bag before him was

a mysterious, threatening omen of dead devilishness. Blaikie trembled despite himself.

With a struggle Blaikie got to his feet, and drank a huge four fingers of brandy. After a second and third dose he once more plucked up courage to approach the ehrunken clothes. The thing was dead, he consoled himself, whatever black wraith it might leave, and in any case he must get it out of sight.

Blaikie took still another drink, then pushed the thing aside and passed out into the night. In a wooden shed at the far side of a yard he already had dug a grave, and he went over to it and lighted a lamp he previously had left there. Listening intently for the sound of any chance passing wanderer he then retraced his steps to the house.

As a collapsed sack of very light bones Blaikie lifted the vile thing easily, though distastefully, and carried it over to the shed. With as little ceremony as burying a rat he cast the corpse into the hole. Half drunk, yet sweating furiously, he shoveled dirt over it, then, beating it almost level, took the lamp and moved away.

In a semi-trance he slumped into a chair, and sprawled there unconscious till well on into morning.

**D**USK had come, and Blaikie again sat in the room of the safe. The confession now was but paper which never might be used, the whole affair but grisly history. The only thing, which had actual knowledge of the genesis of the crimes had passed to where its voice never could be raised.

The room became dark, and Blaikie still sat on. Fearing, though content, he lingered long and drowzed. It was done, quite done, and now would come peace and the struggle to forget.

Blaikie's drowse soon lapsed into a dream in which he found himself in a forest, and he thought he heard the scrape of an insect boring in wood. The forest came nearer, and the scrape soon was real and loud. Instantly awake and alive, he listened to a busy "tick, tick, tick," and it seemed the borer was with him. At once it was—a borer in the wall.

The man got up to find the panel it was in, but his search already was arranged for him. Something gripped him, held him, forced him and led him to the safe. A power he couldn't see held his hands and, through an open panel, pressed them on the combination of the safe. Wrenching and squeezing, the power held the wrists and made the hands twist the knob. His fingers fumbled, tingled, froze.

Then nausea came. The safe unopened, he crumpled soggily in a swoon.

The next day Blaikie came to himself, and shakily got to his feet. Hands to forehead, for a while he staggered about to collect his mind. The servants still were away and would be until he sent for them, nothing was known, and he'd keep out of the room for the time being and hide from the thing. Last night must have been one of overtaxed imagination; a nightmare—that was all.

Blaikie lifted a hand higher to smooth his hair and, as it rose, it passed his eyes. His eyes flickered, then the eyes bulged wide. On the wrist was a deep purple mark—a hand with fingers which were webbed. The other hand, shudderingly, was held up for inspection. That wrist, too, had a purple bruise.

Then Blaikie laughed.

Under a tree that night they found him—dead, apparently, and staring at the stars. On each wrist

was the dreaded webbed grip mark.

How could he be the murderer when the real murderer had attacked him, too?

He was too utterly scared, he explained later, on coming to, to be able to give an exact description of his assailant; but no one asked why he, alone, of all was the only one who should recover.

**F**OR two days the man with the fear of notoriety, was laid up, and then it came to him there could be no use holding the confession longer when all need for hiding it had gone. He'd finish the thing for all time, and get it off his mind. With a strange shrinking he turned the combination of the safe to produce the document, then automatically looked it over. Instantly and dazedly he paled and winced.

The terror had doted the paper without his noticing it, and had dated it a month earlier than the night of his visit. He must have seen into the future. How could Bleikie account for its coming to him through the mail and from a great distance when the writer of it had been here at that date?

As Blaikie reached over to replace the paper, his sleeve slipped back. Almost unbelieving, he glanced from one to the other of the wrists. The purple marks had disappeared and the wrists were clear and natural. Still almost unbelieving, but happy, he pulled the sleeves a little higher, then his fingers loosed the confession and it fluttered to the floor.

The hideousness yet was there—and they were working up his arms!

Frightened to the verge of illness Blaikie remained in his house, but the room now had an irresistible influence over him, and much of his time was spent in it. And at dusk toward the end of the

week he drowsed at the table by the safe.

A "click-click" presently broke in on his sleep, and instantly he was wide awake. For half an hour he sat helplessly and stared. Not a mist or a thing could be seen, no vapory movement, no slightest stir, yet the clicking went patiently on.

The clicking came to a stop, and still the man kept watching. A tiny breeze, almost visible, rustled round the picture, then he felt a coldness close in front of him. The next second a vise-like grip had him by both shoulders, and slowly was drawing him up.

Blaikie attempted to struggle and wriggle out, tried to scream and shout for non-existent help, but the grip moved him ruthlessly forward and held him before the picture. Cruelly squeezing and pinching, the thing held the hands past the opened panel, and guided them to clutch and turn the combination, then Bleikie gasped and his tongue went dry.

He fell to the floor, and lay insensible.

**B**LAIKIE rose dazedly from out of his stupor and, mousing with fear, threw himself upon his bed. The knowledge that he had been relentlessly using a weapon he couldn't control and which now was turned full force on him clawed into his very soul. The spots where the unseen thing had gripped him already were burning, and the urge to rub them was intense. The burning at last became unbearable, and he frantically tore away his clothes.

On each shoulder was the purple mark of a webbed hand.

With a sickly sense of impending doom he lay in a state of coma till the break of dawn.

For three days Blaikie kept from the room of the safe, though the place seemed to reach out and pull



him. The longing to leave the house altogether was overwhelming, but the strain of keeping away was as bad as the terror itself. And each day the marks by degrees crept higher, crept past the shoulders, bridged his neck, touched the edge of his jaws.

The marks swiftly crawled up his cheeks, drew to the bottoms of his eyes, stretched above them, soon a thumbmark went over each lid, and the purple stain was as of fire.

Then of a sudden the thumbs began to press with a horrible, burning intensity.

Blaikie howled as he sensed the meaning of the first touch of torture, and rushed for water. The water only seemed to sizzle and scald and add to the fierceness of the burns. Incoherently mouthing he turned in despair toward the door of the fateful room, but the fire, he found, had dimmed his sight. As a blind man he staggered and blundered on until he fell into a chair beside a table. Moaning and drooling, he rocked backward and forward and, fearing, yet hoping, listened for the ghostly clicks.

But something gripped him without warning and, unconsciously, he worked without knowing what he did.

The sun streamed in when he awoke, and he opened his eyes and looked around him. To his amazement no pain was left, and the nervousness and nausea had gone. Fresh and limber he rose from where he was, and stepped to the nearest mirror.

In it he saw his face clean and clear as on any day in his life.

Delighted, yet unconvinced, he removed part of his clothing. Not a mark or blemish was to be seen, not a sign. The horror had left with the confession, and his body and his mind once more were his own.

ALL that day Blaikie stayed at home to straighten himself and things out, and the next morning he'd face the world. There was nothing to fear in publicity now; he felt that he was now the one to be pitied. He might even for the sake of sympathy give hints of the terror he'd been through.

The man rose after his first natural sleep, and bathed and put on clean clothes. For the moment he imagined himself a hero, and that he must dress and live the part. With a kettle of boiling water he presently went back to the bathroom, and made ready for a much-needed shave.

Light-hearted, and almost gay, Blaikie rubbed lather on a weak-old stubble then. He looked away for a moment and mechanically scraped his upper lip and chin. The stubble came off, and he peered into a mirror to observe his progress—then the razor crashed, broken, to the floor.

Over his mouth was a deep purple gripping webbed hand—the Hand of Silence—and there was no way of getting it off.

In a panic Blaikie stopped. His shave had become a thing quite useless; his clean clothes were wasted. Like a demented man he wandered aimlessly about the house for another week waiting for another slight coating of hair. With his face covered sufficiently to hide instant notice of the stain, and with a little artificial aid, he at last ventured out and closed the house, and then without a word to a soul took a train north, into the Great Karroo. For a month he lay hidden in a Kaffir hut in the desert, and prayed that the sun and his beard might blacken his face till he never again would be known.

A BILL-COLLECTOR calling at Blaikie's house, now reputed haunted, was the first to break

the spell, and he wanted to know where he might apply for his money. Only then did the mystery of the tenantless house and the missing man link themselves together. And only then did a colored woman remember having seen a light in a shed one night, and gossiping, let out that she'd crept up barefooted and watched a man filling a hole.

The police took her to show them the shed, and evidence of something having been buried was at once apparent. Recollection of the farmer having been attacked instantly assured them that he'd again been assailed, then killed and buried. Investigation caused the diggers suddenly to know differently, and to recoil, horrified.

The bag of skin inside the clothes at length was dragged out and several observers timidly prodded it. The thing had a human head, which, terrible when alive, was now ever more awesome. More courageous than the others, one man reached into the corpse's pocket, and an overlooked draft of a confession came to light. The confession was in Blaikie's handwriting.

At once, and with the safety of numbers, more diligent examination was made, and, after the webbed hands, the bullet hole in the back was exposed. Looking queerly from one to the others the searchers all guessed the same thing.

Blaikie was behind every crime, this was his agent, danger had come and he'd sacrificed the man he had hired and had fled. Then others related the bringing of the mysterious man from the interior two years before, and the whole thing was absurdly apparent.

**W**ORD came to a doctor at a station in the Karroo that a white man, lying in a native hut,

was dangerously ill, and the doctor rode over to him. The man, he found, was pitifully weak, and unable to explain just what was the matter with him, and the doctor had to make thorough examination. Under the straggly beard and moustache, he discovered, were dark, unpleasant-looking stains, and those appeared to be part of the disease.

The man wasn't strong enough to resist, and the doctor shaved him clean. Then the doctor did some quick thinking. The hunt for the missing murderer had been blazoned across the country, and no other man marked thus would have reason to hide among natives.

The Hand of Silence spoke out of its own!

A cured man, ready to fight, but not knowing all that was ahead of him, Blaikie came back as a prisoner to Cape Town. A sullen crowd stood in court, staring at Blaikie's hands which he immediately tried to conceal from their gaze.

"An accessory before and after the fact in every case," the prosecutor declared. "The actual murderer in one case."

"Of whom?" Blaikie's counsel asked, before the court could stop him.

"Of Trundle," the public prosecutor said, condescendingly. But Blaikie's man followed on with a sarcastic "But of what?"

With the inexorable precision of a British court the judge pronounced the death sentence, and the sentence was the end of argument. The man had to die—after three Sundays following the verdict. That was all.

**W**ITH brain dull and gloomy Blaikie paced up and down his short cell and counted the hours. To-morrow at sunrise—the dawn of the last day. A rope, an instant twinge—and nothing more.

Ah!—but the horror leading up to it?

Dusk came and the jail was lighted, and a guard sat outside the door, but still Blaikie walked up and down. A march of madness, a march of torment, but never a flicker of penance. He had only sorrow for himself, and bitterness at defeat.

The night passed, and hurrying soft steps paddled over the corridor. A last quick, cautious inspection to see that all preparations were in order. But one half hour more and then a blank. Weary, numb, stomach sickening, Blaikie paced back and forth, his feet independent of his brain, his brain a rattling void. The end was near....

Something stood inside the cell, and Blaikie collided with it and felt it. A cold, still wind it seemed, and the wind had weight and shape. Dazed, Blaikie stopped and

wondered, then peered senselessly at the unseen. His hand went out to touch it; then his eyes went wide and never again closed.

Something clutched the hand, then seized the other one, while two ghostly eyes which only he could see bored into his own. A steely grip hugged him closer, till the eyes appeared to meet and become part of his own. Retching, he opened his mouth to shout. He gagged, he struggled for breath; but his lips only stayed fixed and wide apart. His head seemed to be filled with hot ice. . . .

The guard, peeping through the slit in the door, saw the look of frenzied horror on Blaikie's features. He hurriedly slipped the bolt and rushed in. But it was finished.

Slowly, stiffly, Blaikie sagged backward, and lay with purpling wrists. The Hand of Silence had stroked him!

## A Remarkable Mirage

MIRAGES take many forms and appear at all angles and sometimes in duplicate and triplicate, but seldom are they observed as a Captain Scoresby saw one off the West Coast of Greenland many years ago.

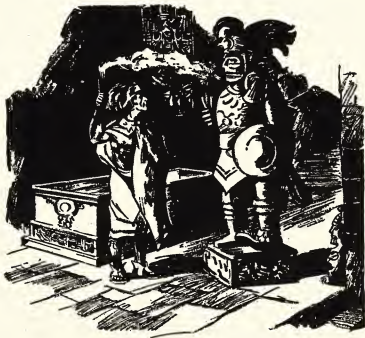
On the day when he saw this remarkable effect the sky was clear, and a tremulous and perfectly transparent mist was particularly profuse. At nine o'clock in the morning, having at that time approached so close to the then unexplored shore of Greenland that the land appeared distinct and bold, Captain Scoresby determined to make a drawing of it; but on making the attempt he found that the outline was constantly changing, and he resorted to his telescope to learn the reason why.

He discovered, in his own words, that "the general telescopic appearance of the coast was that of an extensive ancient city abounding with the ruins of castles, obelisks, churches and monuments, with other large and conspicuous buildings. Some of the hills seemed to be surmounted by towers, battlements, spires and pinnacles; while others, subjected to one or two reflections, exhibited large masses of rock, apparently suspended in the air at a considerable elevation above the actual termination of the mountains to which they referred.

"The whole exhibition was a grand

phantasmagoria. Scarcely was any particular portion sketched before it changed its appearance and assumed that of an object totally different. It was perhaps alternately a castle, a cathedral or an obelisk; then, expanding horizontally and coalescing with the adjoining hills, it would unite the intermediate valleys, though some miles in width, by a bridge of a single arch, of the most magnificent appearance and extent. Notwithstanding these repeated changes, the various figures had all the distinctness of reality; and not only the different streets, but also the veins of the rocks, with the wreaths of snow occupying ravines and fissures, formed sharp and distinct lines, and exhibited every appearance of the most perfect solidity.

It is well known that mirages are caused by the refraction of light from a distant point by its passing through an atmosphere that varies in density, and so gives the effect of a prism; but seldom does one see in a mirage any actual thing that does not exist on the surface of the earth within a score or two of miles. In the light of this it is an intriguing mystery whence came the "ruins of castles, obelisks, churches and monuments" that were refracted to the observer off that lonely, frozen and uncivilized coast of Greenland.



# Guatemozin the Visitant

*A Complete Novelette*

By Arthur J. Burks

## CHAPTER I

### *The Mysterious Stranger*

**S**PADES and mattocks had unearthed a little of the glory of the vanished city and my laborers had gone off, leaving me to gloat in solitude over my find. As I stood in that narrow cleft, which had so recently been

uncovered my whole body tingled with ecstacy. To right and left were the ancient writings of the Aztecs, etched by hands lifeless these many centuries, writings that had remained here, immovable as the rocks on which their seal was set, until the debris of time had covered them from sight of man. And now they had been

Goaded by hate unquenchable,  
Guatemozin the Aztec rises in  
superhuman might against the city  
of his enemies.

brought forth again, a treasure house of knowledge to which only I possessed the key.

It was worth all the hardships which had been mine, worth all the suffering that sickness had brought me during the weary months just passed, just to stand there and pass caressing fingers over the rough stone whose markings would reveal to me the secrets of a civilization vanished from the earth. There were dark openings in the masonry here and there, openings which I had caused to be cleared, but whose depths I had not penetrated. What would I find? Bodies of brown men, clothed in all the splendor which

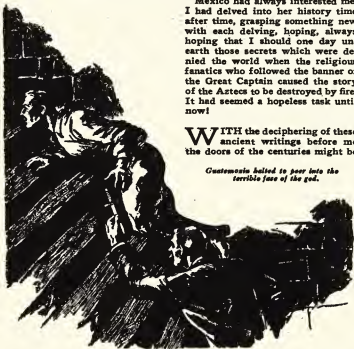
was the right of the nobles of Montezuma? Chests of treasure? Or hidden things, hoary with age, emanating intangible menace across the years? I licked my lips with anticipation. I was like one mad with pleasure. My treasure was here, the treasure of a digger after antiquity, and I had but to put forth my hand and take it.

But still I hesitated. It seemed like sacrilege, somehow, like despoiling the grave of a friend. And so, after having labored these many months to attain a desired end, I hesitated to explore further and to take what was rightfully my own. I could not help regarding my discovery with a feeling of awe.

Mexico had always interested me. I had delved into her history time after time, grasping something new with each delving, hoping, always hoping that I should one day unearth those secrets which were denied the world when the religious fanatics who followed the banner of the Great Captain caused the story of the Aztecs to be destroyed by fire. It had seemed a hopeless task until now!

**W**ITH the deciphering of these ancient writings before me the doors of the centuries might be

*Guatemalan halted to peer into the terrible face of the god.*



rolled back so that all the world might approach and peer through.

And this, I promised myself, would be but the beginning. Given new strength by this success, I would continue on, unraveling the thread of forgotten history, passing it akin by akin through my eager fingers, until all the world should know the glory which was Anáhuac.

But I was tired from my many labors. My head ached. I had driven my laborers from dawn to dusk and I had forced myself to the very limit of endurance. In spite of the whips of my desire, which lashed me on, I decided to wait until morning to penetrate the mysteries of my treasure house. So I rose and brushed the dust from my knees, blinking my eyes to drive away the airy dots, yellow and significant, which hung before my eyes. I had driven myself too harshly, I told myself—and laughed, knowing that when morning came I would drive myself more harshly still.

I wrinkled my nose at the odors which came from the opening in the walls of the cleft. Odors that clung to my nostrils strangely, stirring faint echoes in my memory—though I knew I had never before experienced them. How could I? An hour ago there had been no openings and, from the top of the cleft, I had been urging my peon laborers to greater speed. I laughed now as I recalled it, laughed at the superstitious dread which had flashed, as though at a signal, across the faces of the peons, when the opening were exposed. I paid them in the end and tired though they were, they went away hurriedly, half-running, looking back over their shoulders to where I stood, as though expecting unseen monsters to follow them out of the opening.

**T**HERE was no place in my heart for superstition. How could there be; and I a scientist? Ogres of

the mind, invented by simple people with the brains of children! I believed in nothing I couldn't feel, see or prove.

I clambered stiffly from the cleft and looked all around me. There was no human being anywhere within the scope of my vision, and nothing to show that humanity ever came this way, save the heap of debris brought up from the cleft. I needed no one to guard my treasure house, I knew, for the peons who had worked for me would spread many tales among their kind, and native superstition would be an effectual barrier to the curious. This was bad, too, for I might yet need aid in my investigations, and knew that I might never find it, unless I secured it from among the educated of the Capital City. This I did not care to do, for I knew the ways of Mexico, and foresaw all sorts of wrangles with officials whose imaginations would fill my discovery with that vast, undiscovered treasure which was lost when Malinche drove the Aztecs from Tenochtitlán. No, I needed a peon to help me, or a man of my own race—and knew that I could get neither by the time I was ready.

I was pondering my difficulties as I strode away, heading for a road that led into the heart of Mexico City, where I hoped to catch a ride.

Just before I passed around a knoll I turned and looked back. Not as the peons had done, with fear consuming my soul, but for a last look at my treasure house, which I would not see again until to-morrow.

**I** STOPPED short, with an ejaculation of amazement. At the lip of the cleft, his torso visible over a shoulder of the pile of debris, stood a regal figure! It was a man, I knew, even at that distance, and he stood as straight as a statue, with none of the cervile eag to his shoulders which is the mark of the burden-bearer of Mexico. Yet he wasn't a

white man—nor was he like any Indians that I knew—nor was he a member of that hybrid myriad which is the population of Mexico. A commanding figure, like a bronze god, I thought, as he stood there, indifferent to his surroundings. The dying sun was tinting his upturned face, and the man was facing the west, motionless, watching the sun go down.

I turned swiftly and started back; but there was a feeling of uncertainty in me which amazed me because I could not understand it. I wanted to go back, to protect my treasure; yet something deep within me warned me, telling me to turn again, and leave this bronze man to his musings. After all, I argued, what harm could he do? He couldn't carry away my discovery, but. . .

He turned, calmly, as one turns at an undesired interruption, and looked at me. He did not start, did not cower as a peon would have done, and seemed to regard me as a person decidedly his inferior. Faugh! An Indian! I'd show him.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Get away from there! What are you doing? Where did you come from?"

HE shook his head slightly, and I noted that his black eyes wandered over my whole figure, and that there was dawning wonder in them, as though he pondered what manner of man I was. His black eyes came to rest on my face, and in that instant all expression vanished from his countenance, so that he looked like a graven image, asking nothing, saying less. Then I noticed that he wore clothing such as I had never seen before. He wore the girdle and square *títmatli* of the Aztecs, made of the finest cotton! He wore sandals and—I started on seeing this—their soles were of gold, and the thongs which held them were embossed in gold. There were precious stones in his cloak and sandals,

emeralds and jadeite. I was furious.

"Who are you?" I shouted. "Where did you get that clothing? You have been rifling my discovery! Give it to me instantly, or I will take you to the city and give you to the law!"

He shook his head again, and a trace of a smile touched his lips. But I was staring at him, noting new details of his dress. There was no ornament on his head, save a *panache* of green plumes, hanging down his back. . .

Which I knew to indicate military rank among the Aztecs!

My anger knew no bounds, though I decided to move cautiously, feeling that I was in the presence of a dangerous madman. He must have been mad, this—Indian I called him—that he had been able to so forget native superstition as to enter a place I had not yet penetrated, steal some of my treasures, and clothe himself as he had done. Yet I couldn't help admitting that his vestments somehow became him. But to all my questions he shook his head, nor did he move from his place. I tried him in Spanish, in as many different Indian dialects as I commended—but his reply was always the same, a calm shake of the head.

I APPROACHED him, my hands extended to tear his finery from him. He did not move, did not draw back; but his eyes never left mine and . . . my hands fell to my sides without touching him!

I tried him in sign language; he watched the movements of my hands curiously, and his eyes came back to meet mine when I had finished.

He spoke at last, and I understood his words—and amazement such as I had never experienced before took possession of me.

His voice was soft, gentle as that of a woman, and the words came from his lips with the calm assurance of a man who has full command of himself.

"I am Guatemoxin! Lead me to Malinche!"

He did not ask me my name, nor did he seem to care about my identity. It was as though I didn't matter at all. I started to laugh at what he said; but something stayed me.

*Malinche* indeed! *Malinche* was the Aztec name for the Great Captain, Cortés, dead these four centuries, and *Guatemoxin* with him. But I didn't laugh at him. There is something about madness that does not make for laughter. I dared not attack. I knew that madness would give him added strength, and that I might never live to see the finish of the fight—and I was tired from my many labors. So I turned abruptly, beckoning him to follow—a gesture I would have used to a stubborn child. I did not look back, but I knew from the sound that he followed.

But not for more than a yard or two!

He came up behind me, brushed me aside imperiously, and strode on ahead—as I had many times brushed aside peons who obstructed my path.

AND so he preceded me to the road which led to the Capital City. I was glad of the opportunity to study him, and a queer rustling of the short hair at the base of my skull troubled me. The head of the bronze-skinned man turned slightly this way and that, as though he searched for landmarks. I saw his face in profile and it was a veritable mask of bewilderment, that bewilderment which crosses the face of a madman when you speak to him of something beyond his power to comprehend.

We came to the road and halted, while the stranger looked about him slowly.

But all his arrogance had gone from him, and by the time a car had deigned to notice us, and stopped to offer us a lift into the Capital City, the stranger was a perfect picture

of pitiful amazement—amazement and no little fear. He watched the cars hurtle by, and he trembled as each one passed. Finally his eyes came back to me, as though I had been a friend, and there was a frightened question in them.

This fellow was determined to play out his madman's rôle to the bitter end, I told myself. The car that had stopped for us was a rickety flivver, and was already full of natives; but natives always believe that there is room for one or two more, even though they ride on the running-boards. These natives, well-dressed young Mexicans, stared at my companion in stark surprise. Then they began to laugh among themselves, pointing at the stranger, touching their foreheads with their forefingers.

I looked at the madman. He had drawn himself regally erect. Guatemoxin—I called him that until I could learn his real name—stared at his tormentors for a moment only, and acted so swiftly that I almost failed to stop him. A dagger, jeweled of hilt, came into his hand from somewhere in the depths of his robe, and he sprang toward the flivver like a panther. I sprang at him, shouting; but the blow did not strike the Mexicans. It fell, yes, and the blade snapped off against the door of the car! My companion leaped back, staring at the car in bewilderment, and from the car to me.

BUT I knew he had stabbed at the car, and not at the men who rode inside it—and when nothing happened, when the rattling noise of the car's engine did not change in the least, he turned to me like a hurt child, and I took the dagger from his limp fingers. I spoke to the Mexicans sharply in Spanish, offering the only explanation I knew, and we were taken into the car and whirled toward the city.

I rode beside Guatemoxin, and I



studied him as we rode. He trembled when the car jerked into motion; but his face became motionless on the instant, and he was as indifferent to our conveyance from that moment on as I was myself. It was a proud indifference, the haughty disdain of a prince of the blood.

But as we approached the city I saw his eyes roam this way and that, drinking in detail after detail. When we finally swung into Paseo de la Reforma, with its western extremity in the very shadow of Chapultepec, I read, deeply hidden underneath the stony expression, something so appalling that a weird terror came to grasp me by the throat with invisible fingers.

For that which I read in the face of Guatemozin was stark fear!

But mad as the man evidently was, there was greatness in him of a sort. His head lifted proudly after a moment, and while he observed everything about him as before, his eyes were mere slits beside his slender nose, whose nostrils quivered like those of a thoroughbred horse which has been frightened; but which refuses to bolt because it is a thoroughbred.

AND something struck me with the force of a blow. Guatemozin, whom I had found at the very edge of the city, had never before entered it. He had never seen an automobile, or men who dressed as these Mexicans and myself were dressed. Whence then, in God's name, had he come? There had been a certain eagerness in his face as we approached the city, and an ejaculation in a strange tongue burst from his lips when he saw the summer palace of the president at the crest of Chapultepec. And I realized that he knew Chapultepec; but had never seen the palace, nor any of the buildings at the crest of the monolith—and some of them had been built before this man had been born!

It was a strange puzzle. My mind went back to my meeting with Guatemozin—at the lip of the cleft. One moment I had been the only human being anywhere near. The next, I had looked back, to see Guatemozin, in all his silly finery, peering steadfastly into the eyes of the dying sun—as though he had just come out of the bowels of the earth.

Out of the bowels of the earth!

My spine tingled as the thought repeated itself in my mind. But it was silly, and no scientist would have harbored such a thought for a moment.

But there was one thing the madness of Guatemozin could not explain: how did it happen that he had understood no language in which I tried to speak to him, and had finally spoken to me in that which had been the tongue of those dead and gone peoples who had etched hieroglyphs around and about the opening in my just-discovered treasure house?

## CHAPTER II

### *The Stigmata*

PEOPLE stared at us curiously as Guatemozin followed me through the door of my hotel in the heart of the city. The people in the lobby of the hotel stared, too, and the manager started to come forward, his hand raised in protest, when I led Guatemozin on through, and up the stairs to my room. There was one thing of which I was sure: Guatemozin, however mad he might be, bore me no ill-will. I knew, also, that he had none of that superstitious fear of my treasure house which had possessed the peons—and my decision followed my knowledge as surely as proof follows a theory based on solid fact. I would need a man to help me on my discovery. He did not need experience or technical knowledge. He need only understand the virtue of obedience, and in that I could instruct him, Guate-

moxin must be my aide in my future explorations into the ruins of Tenochtitlán.

He preceded me through the door of my room, and once across the threshold he paused to look about him. Then he turned to me, and a slight frown of annoyance touched his coppery forehead.

"Where," he said slowly in his ancient language, "is Malinche? I told you to take me to him."

Right now, I told myself, would be a good time for me to let this Guatemozin know what I intended.

"Listen, Guatemozin," I said sternly, in Spanish, "whatever the reason for your silly pretense, it no longer exists."

He held up his hand imperiously.

"Speak slowly," he said, "if you must use Spanish, for I learned but little of it!"

**I** CHOKED down my wrath and continued:

"Stop the silly pretense! You are no more mad than I am. Your name may be Guatemozin—but Malinche, if you mean the Great White Captain, has been dead these four hundred years! Guatemozin, your namesake, according to the best record we have of him, was a captive of Malinche. The Aztecs have vanished from the face of the earth, utterly destroyed by the Conquistadores. Montezuma—"

I saw a look of bitterness, the bitterness of despair, cross the face of the stranger as I mentioned Montezuma.

"Montezuma?" he said. "He is dead, too. I know that. He died like a slave in chains, a prisoner of Malinche, and then—and then Malinche and his men came forth from their fortress, and put the people of Montezuma to the sword; men, women, and children! But, to the everlasting glory of the Aztecs, they defied the invaders until starvation had so reduced them that there was

no resistance left in them—and those who died beneath the swords and lances of Malinche's men, died with hate in their faces, defying the white men with their last breath."

Guatemozin did not say it like that of course, for he had little Spanish. He paused at intervals to search for words, and when the Spanish word evaded him he used the language of the hieroglyphs. His face was stormy as he spoke. It made me recall accounts I had read of the final taking of Tenochtitlán, and the glorious spirit of the defeated natives of Anáhuac, who fought on as long as their arms, weak from starvation, could lift and hurl a lance. There was that same glorious spirit to be seen in the face of this madman.

And how did he, a simple Indian—yet like no Indian I had ever seen—know so much of the past of Anáhuac? I might learn much from this man, for all his madness.

"Guatemozin," I said, "this way of living is all new to you. You can't go out with me, dressed like that. I shall send for a clothier, and a barber, and while they are making you over I shall talk to you of Malinche, of Tenochtitlán, and—of Guatemozin."

**S**INCE I had first spoken to Guatemozin in Spanish he had stood as one in a daze. The real Guatemozin, magically returned to the world after four hundred years, could not have shown more amazement than I saw in the face of this madman—who believed himself to be that Guatemozin.

And I had other surprises in store for me. When new clothes were brought, and being fitted, and Guatemozin's hair was being trimmed to modern standards, I sat on my bed and told him of the vanished glory of Anáhuac. I told him all that history had left to us of the past of the Aztecs, of the arrival in Tenochtitlán

lán of the Conquistadores, riding their mailed horses, which they sat so nobly that the Aztecs thought horse and man one creature. I told him of the massacre of Aztec worshippers by the brutal Alvarado, of the taking of Montezuma, of his death, and his dying wish that Malinche take charge of his daughters. I told him of the fight on the causeway, of that impossible leap which Alvarado made to escape the lances of the natives, of the defeat of the Spaniards—how Cortés had wept that awful morning after *la noche triste*. I told him of the return of the Great White Captain, with fresh reinforcements of Indian allies, of the capture of Tenochtitlán and the slaying of the Aztecs who refused until the last to yield. And then, watching him narrowly as I spoke, I told him of the attempted escape of the chieftain, Guatemozin, and of his capture, and what he had said when they finally took him.

"I am Guatemozin! Take me to Malinche!"

Even as I repeated the words of the proud chieftain, who had surrendered only to save his people from further slaughter, a cold chill caressed my spine—for I was remembering something. What had this Guatemozin said when I had discovered him at the door of my treasure house?

"I am Guatemozin! Take me to Malinche!"

AND there was something else that bothered me: Guatemozin sat stolidly in the chair, submitting to the ministrations of the barber, to the deft hands of the clothier, as unconcernedly as any other man might have done; but as I told of the Conquest, speaking slowly as he had bidden me, he brought me to pause at intervals, and told me calmly of errors I had made in the telling! He spoke as one having authority. . . .

Yet when I showed him the pages of a book he could read no word of it!

What a transformation when the clothier and the barber had made an end of their labors. Guatemozin, with the square *títmatli*, and the *panache* of greenish plumes, had vanished utterly, and in his place, listening quietly, but with his black eyes blazing, sat a young brown-skinned man whose every expression spoke of intelligence beyond the average.

As I say, he corrected me on points of history, that history pertaining to the Conquest; but when I told of that which the succeeding four hundred years had brought, of the strides which Mexico had made, of the rising of Mexico City upon the ruins of Tenochtitlán, I knew that I was speaking of things of which this man had never heard, though he listened to every word I uttered. His lips shaped the words of my speech, as though he made those words his own as they fell from my lips; and when I had finished he spoke softly.

"I understand, friend," he said. "Yes, I understand many things, the greatest of which is this: that the dead are not dead, really, and that the hands of those who fell before Malinche reach out beseechingly, pleading—yes, even across the centuries! For what are they pleading? I know—and I am Guatemozin!"

A strange speech surely, the speech of a madman; yet Guatemozin did not look to be mad. He had doffed his seeming madness with his *títmatli* and his *panache* of plumes, and a quiet, calm-faced man had stepped into my room to take his place.

I SAT up until midnight, telling him of Mexico. Once I offered him a cigar, which he regarded in puzzled wonder, masked admirably, when I lighted up myself.

But after a time, when I had be-

come accustomed to the strangeness of Guatemozin, and the man he had been when I found him had become more or less of a dream. I grew weary of talking, though he sat in his chair, regarding me eagerly, wishing for me to continue.

"Guatemozin," I said, "I am tired. Moreover I am suffering with fever, if you haven't noticed it, and must get some sleep. Take that other bed when you are ready. You will need sleep, too, for to-morrow we have much to do."

He nodded quietly, but did not move. I doffed my clothes, slipped under my blankets, and watched Guatemozin through lowered lids. He did not move, and his eyes did not leave my face. Once, just before I fell asleep, he straightened, and lifted his clenched hands above his head. His lips moved, but I heard no words, and his face was a mask of malevolent hatred—which I *knew* was not for me. Then his eyes came back to my face, and held, while the face again became as expressionless as a graven image. That is my last memory of him, sitting there, like a statue in bronze, watching my face, his eyes staring at my lowered lids. I had the odd fancy, just before I dozed off, that his modern clothing had slipped from him once more, giving place to the robe and the head-dress of plumes—and then I slept.

**H**OW long I slept I have no way of knowing, nor the meaning of the subsequent sleep-waking transition. But when I awoke I had forgotten Guatemozin. I wondered at the burning light in my room, and guessed that I must have been so tired that I had forgotten it. I knew it was several hours before daylight, knew it subconsciously, though I never thought to look at my watch. I glided from the bed, slipped into my clothing, donned my heavy shoes, took my hat from the chair-back, and

let myself out of the hotel. I didn't know why I did these things. My brain gave no conscious command to my limbs. I moved as one in a trance, as though each move had been fore-ordained before my awakening.

The clerk of the hotel was asleep behind the desk. I called to him as I passed, loud enough that he should have heard me; yet he gave no sign, and I let myself out quietly into the deserted streets of the Capital City. When I found myself in Paseo de la Reforma I was neither surprised nor disturbed. This calm acceptance of something I should have wondered about, and didn't, went with me as I strode toward Chapultepec, and, after a space of time that seemed unbelievably short, found myself on a familiar trail that led into unpopulated territory, outside the Capital City. I turned and looked back. The lights of the city were blurred with distance, and all about me was the mysterious silence of night time, and I was unafraid.

Nor was I surprised, when, through the gloom, I saw the pile of debris that my laborers had built up to excavate the ruins of my treasure house. Here I should have remembered Guatemozin; but I didn't. Why, I know not—and when I came to the lip of the cleft, whose bottom was filled with darkness, I did not hesitate. There was no telling what horrors of antiquity were bidden in the openings in the sides of the cleft, but fear had no place in me then, and I descended into the cleft in utter silence, with not even a bit of dislodged earth preceding me into the shadows. In the instant that I entered one of the openings, which I chose from several without a moment of hesitation, the world I had left behind me was non-existent, forgotten.

**I**NKY blackness was all about me. But I could see for all that—could see the steps which my feet

found instinctively, as though I had been here before. I came to the bottom of the steps at last, and the stairway seemed interminable, winding down and down into the very bowels of the earth. I halted at the bottom, looking about me—and knew that I stood on the floor of an ancient tomb. Dimly through the gloom I could see hieroglyphs like those at the top of the stairs, and the import of some of them bewildered me. I strode closer, the better to read them, and knew, as my fingers traced the aged pictures, that the world would be astounded at what I would have to tell when I was ready.

I circled the chamber, which was almost square, its corners facing the cardinal points of the compass, its roof lost in the darkness, and passed another winding stairway leading still farther into the depths of the earth. But I did not care to descend at the moment, not until I had further explored this chamber of the long since vanished dead.

In the center of the chamber, on a raised block of stone, around which were other hieroglyphs, was a long, narrow box, which gave forth a metallic sound when I thumped it with my knuckles. It was shaped like a coffin, and I wondered that no chill assailed me when I knew that this was a sarcophagus. Instead, as indifferently as though I were sitting down to a meal in the Capital City, I raised myself and tried to look into the top of the sarcophagus.

But there was a cover on it which moved beneath my hands when I exerted my strength. Inch by inch I forced the cover free, until it balanced on the edge of the sarcophagus—passed the center of balance, tilted and clattered to the floor of the tomb with a noise that should have been heard in Chapultepec.

Once more I raised myself, peering into the depths of this casket which had held a human body.

But it was empty, save for a pair of sandals with golden soles. No bones, no slightest indication that a human body had rested here.

**B**EWILDERED at my failure to discover what I had hoped, I dropped to my knees before the lid of the sarcophagus, and studied the inscription on it.

*"I am Guatemoxin, whose spirit watches forever over the destinies of Tenochtitlan!"*

It did not surprise me, that inscription, for I had been expecting it—had known what I would find before I had even entered this chamber that which should have ordinarily been gruesome. I seemed to accept it as a matter of course.

There was nothing further to be learned here and, moving again as though every step had been taken beforehand, I strode to that other opening and started down the stairs, seeing my way clearly, because of some light which came from I knew not where. That other stairway seemed long, long. I took more steps than I had taken from my hotel to Chapultepec, more than I had taken from Chapultepec to the door of my treasure house—which had become a treasure house indeed.

Down, down, ever down winding stairs that seemed endless—stone steps upon which my heavy shoes fell loudly, causing echoes to reverberate through distances my eyes could not penetrate. I paused, for the sound, and the echoes, bothered me—and wondered why I paused. Until, feeling a slight weight in my right hand, I lifted that hand to my eyes—and discovered that I carried the sandals I had found in the empty sarcophagus of Guatemoxin! I did not smile to myself. I knew what was expected of me. I sat down on the step which first came under my body, slipped off my shoes, setting them aside, and donned the sandals with the golden soles.

TIME passed as I descended. An hour. Two hours. Fifteen minutes. What does it matter?

I came to the foot of the stairway at last, and as I stood there, staring, though not surprised, I saw a door before me—a door through which came the light of the great outdoors—outdoors where the sun was shining.

And before I strode through that door I knew what I should see, or thought I did.

Would to God that I had turned back then, content with what I had already learned!

But I was a scientist, and believed in nothing that I could not feel, see, or prove. I strode to the door and through it. . . .

To find myself in the midst of a multitude!

I turned dazedly and looked behind me. The door whence I had issued was the door of a sanctuary, at the crest of a *teocalli* of the Aztec war-god of the unpronounceable name! There was no mountain above the sanctuary, through whose heart that interminable stairway should have led downward, and the roof of the sanctuary was but a few feet above the door!

In an instant the world I knew had turned topsy-turvy, and out of it, like a creature from out of the Fourth Dimension, I had come striding—to find myself atop this pyramidal mound, a hundred and fifty feet above the floor of a valley whose outlines seemed strangely familiar. A valley cut and slashed by canals and waterways crowded with *piraguas* filled with bronze-skinned people. I had stepped into the midst of a crowd of two hundred or more, atop the *teocalli*, and right before me, over the bowed shoulders of half-nude worshippers, I saw the grim visage of Huitzilopochtli, the war-god, with his censor of steaming human hearts, the rough stones below him red with gore!

NO one noticed me, though I stood in the midst of them. A red-handed priest stooped above the huge sacrificial block before the war-god, and his eyes, alight with the fires of brutal fanaticism, stared straight into the burning orb of the setting sun. Stretched on the hideous block, beneath the knife of the priest, was a naked human body, and as I watched, I called out—though no one seemed to hear me—and the priest looked down. His knife descended as his lips broke into a toneless monotonous chanting, and the body on the block quivered convulsively. No sound of screaming broke from the tortured lips of the victim—who quivered and became still, even as the red hand of the priest, redder still, and dripping now, rose once more . . . and held forth, toward the sun, the palpitating heart of a human being!

From the multitude on the *teocalli*, the valley beyond the pyramid, and those who rode silently along in the myriad of huge *piraguas*, arose the sound of chanting—chanting that was toneless and monotonous, like the chanting of the priest.

I strode through the crowd, nor had they yet seen me, until I stood at the very side of the great block of sacrifice, the block with all its hieroglyphs, and looked down into the face of the man who lay there.

He was white, as white as myself!

IN a frenzy of anger I turned to the priest, cursing him for a butcher; but he paid me no heed, and chanted on. Finally he placed the steaming heart beside those others I had already seen, and turned to look behind him.

Climbing upward to the flat summit of the *teocalli* came a terrible cavalcade! There were several, I counted five, white men, stripped to the waist, and they were urged ahead by priests with murderous whips in their hands. These white men wore

coronals of plumes, and carried fans in their stiffening hands. As they clambered upward, they paused at intervals, at command of the priests, to take part in dances in honor of the Aztec god of war. At the crest of the *teocalli* they were stripped of their finery and one by one, with never an outcry or a murmur of protest, were stretched on the sacrificial stone—to deliver their beating hearts to the knife of the butcher-priest!

I saw their faces, just as I had seen the face of the first; and memory of them will never leave me.

I was sick, nauseated, and there was nothing I could do to aid the sufferers—and death, when it came, was merciful.

With a cry of horror, when my will could bear no more, I turned away and ran toward the door whence I had come. Blindly I ran, stumbling over the threshold. I stumbled again when I reached the stairway, for it was in darkness, and I had come in from the sunlight. I fell heavily, my head struck one of the stone steps, and merciful oblivion wiped out the horror which had been mine.

I opened my eyes in my hotel, and shuddered. It had been a dream then—thank God!

**I** TURNED and looked across at the other bed. It had not been slept in. The man who had called himself Guatemozin still sat in the chair as I had left him and, apparently, hadn't moved or slept. I called a cheery greeting to him, and slipped from my bed stiffly, sore from the labors of yesterday, and donned my clothes. This done, and sitting on the edge of my bed, I felt about for my shoes.

I did not find them. I stooped over then, looking about for them. My shoes had vanished; but where I had last seen them, slide by slide, just peeping from beneath the bed, was

a pair of sandals with golden soles!

I guess I screamed. I know that I looked at Guatemozin—and I know that his lips parted in a smile that was grim and unutterably cruel.

But before I could question him the door opened to admit the manager of the hotel. He was wild with excitement, and he carried a morning paper which he extended to me. I paid little heed to his excited jabbering, for the paper had fallen open as he tendered it and, staring up at me from the front page were six pictures of men. And the faces were the faces of the men I had seen in my dream! The men who had been stretched, naked, across the block of sacrifice, before the hideous Huitzilopochtli, to give up their hearts to the hand of the priest!

**I** READ the story of how they had died. Read it hurriedly, skipping whole paragraphs, and stopped, at the end, stunned—as a man who has received a terrific blow between the eyes. They all had died the same way, during the night, and been found in the morning by friends or relatives. Their families, so the story said, were the oldest in the city. But strangest of all was the mark, the same in the case of each of the six, which the autopsies showed on their bodies.

You have heard of the *stigmata*? You have marveled at the meaning which lies hidden under the bleeding marks in the feet and hands of people here and there, innocent girls usually, upon whom the significant marks appear, as though by a miracle? Marks of the nails in the hands and feet of the Christ, they say—and they upon whom these marks appear are regarded by the credulous as beings divinely chosen.

There had been *stigmata* in the case of these six men who had died, too.

*A bleeding human heart on the left breast of each!*

## CHAPTER III

*A Haunted City*

I SENT out for new shoes. Aside from the absurdity of wearing sandals, even sandals with golden soles, I couldn't bring myself to don these discovered beneath my bed. My dream of the night just passed had been too vivid, its details too stoutly etched upon the retina of my mind for me even to consider keeping those sandals by me. While I waited for the shoes I had breakfast sent up from the restaurant. The hotel manager himself brought it, and as he came in he glanced inquiringly at Guatemozin, evidently not recognizing in him the bronze-skinned one in square *timatli*, and *panache* of greenish plumes, who had entered with me last evening. I had a reason, too, for eating in my room. I wished to study Guatemozin, and I did not want him to be embarrassed by the attention he would surely attract if he were to take his breakfast in public.

I wondered about his table manners. Yet there proved to be no need of worry. He ate with his fingers, true, but there was a daintiness about his eating that seemed to shame me, with all my modern knowledge of the art of eating.

The manager came in again before we had finished, stood hesitantly inside the door, looking from me to Guatemozin, and back again. There was dread in his face, and fear. When I asked him what he wished the words came forth in a flood, as though he held them in check by force of a will that something unusual had broken and swept aside.

"It is just this terrible thing of the six great men who died," he replied. "Had there been but one, and he with the mark of the bleeding heart upon his left breast, all the Capital City would have been in turmoil, speculating upon the reason behind the strange *stigmata*. But

there were six, from families whose history goes back to the fall of Tenochtitlán, and each of the six bore the bleeding heart on his left breast."

"Yes, yes," I interrupted. "I have read the morning paper, Don Julio. It is strange; but there is always an explanation for even those things which seem inexplicable at first glance."

"But," he asked, "what is the explanation here?"

HE paused to cross himself devoutly before proceeding to offer his own explanation.

"There is evil in it somewhere, like a great shadow that no one can see. It is a shadow which hangs over all the Capital City, over all the country roundabout—and the people seem to know it. This is Thursday, not a religious day, yet all the churches are crowded with worshippers—men, women, and children, who kneel in silence before the shrines. They whisper the name of the *Virgen de Altagracia*, invoking the divine power of My Lady of Guadalupe. They believe that the *stigmata* on the breasts of those who died, or were slain, have a vast and awesome significance.

"Everyone is wondering who will be next, and what is the reason for the shadow that seems to hover over all the city?"

"Tush, tush, Julio! I cannot explain the *stigmata*; but it strikes me as being a bit silly. Isn't it possible that the reporter who wrote the story drew on his imagination, sacrificing the truth for the sake of a story that would stir the superstitious hearts of the populace?"

Don Julio shook his head, his lips grimly pursed. I noted that Guatemozin was watching us through narrowed lids and that, in spite of his lack of Spanish, he knew what we were discussing, and that it interested him vitally. How? I could not guess then—and even now I am re-



luctant to admit the truth of what later became so evident.

"I had intended working at my excavation, Don Julio," I said at length. "I'll go into the city, and have a look at these dead aristocrats—and at the marks on their breasts, the existence of which I gravely doubt."

THE manager left me then, and I turned to Guatemozin.

"You understood?" I demanded.

He nodded his head slightly in affirmation.

"But the marks are there, friend!" he said.

"What! How do you know? Did you leave this room last night?"

He smiled slightly, a smile like the grimace of a bronze gargoyle, and neither denied nor affirmed.

Who was this strange personage? Whence had he come? How had he learned so much of the past of Anáhuac?

And those questions brought others—some of which seemed foolish in the extreme.

What had become of my heavy shoes? How came this pair of sandals under my bed? They were like those Guatemozin had worn—yet Guatemozin's own sat side by side in the midst of the bundle formed by the discarded *titmatli*, the *panache* of greenish plumes. An idea came to me. I stepped across and lifted the *titmatli*, holding it to my nose, examining it with searching eyes. The odor which came from it was the odor I had found in the depths of my treasure house, and the *titmatli*, which had once been white, was almost yellow with age, threatening to crumble under my rough fingers. The sun had been almost down when I had first seen that *titmatli*, and I hadn't noticed the aged yellowness of its color. Guatemozin, as I studied these matters, my mind racing with strange thoughts, watched me indifferently, studying my face.

But that was foolish, worthy only

of the most superstitious of peons. Huitzilopochtli had been real in my dream, too. Yet I knew that the statue of this hideous god reposed at this identical moment in the *Museo Nacional* in the heart of the Capital City. The statue, then, had not been real. It had been but a dream after all.

But still the faces of the six who had died were so hauntingly familiar. . . .

And I knew I had never seen one of those six in life!

I DROPPED the *titmatli* and the *panache* of plumes as I came abruptly to a decision. I turned to Guatemozin.

"Stay here," I commanded, "until I return. I have certain things to do in the city, and when I come back I wish you to go with me back to where I found you. By the way, Guatemozin, where did you come from? How did you get to my treasure house unobserved?"

For a long moment his black eyes stared straight into mine, and something in their depths caused my spine to tingle.

"I will await you here, friend," he said softly at length. "And whence did I come?"

He paused again, as though for dramatic effect.

"When you found me I was fleeing, in disgrace, from Tenochtitlán."

I snorted. What was there about this man who wasn't mad—yet persisted in his madness?

I turned and left him then.

It seemed that a blight indeed had fallen upon Mexico's Capital City. The sun that, in this season of the year, should have been goldening all the city and the countryside, was hidden from view beyond lowering black clouds. They seemed ready at a moment's notice to deluge the world with sheets of falling rain. Yet there was no odor of rain in the air.

The streets were almost deserted. All activities, commercial and otherwise, seemed to be at a standstill, and it did not occur to me to think of this as being but natural because of the greatness of the families which death had touched. There seemed something else behind it all, something deeply hidden, which I, being not of Mexico, and a scientist besides, could not comprehend.

THERE were groups of natives on some of the street corners, and they held the ends of their *serapes* up about their faces as though they feared recognition. They whispered fearfully among themselves, looking all around them at intervals, as though afraid of being overheard.

Something of the superstitious dread which I knew actuated the major portion of Mexico's population settled upon me as I strode through the city, and I could not shake it off. Those black clouds continued to hover above, blotting out the blue sky and the sun, as though the hearts of the volcanoes all over Mexico had suddenly broken, filling the sky with their mingled pall of threatening smoke.

I came to the door of a cathedral, and the door was open. No sound came forth, though I paused to listen, gazing into the darkened heart of the place of worship. Yet I knew that the cathedral was crowded. I drew a deep breath and stepped inside. The place was redolent of many odors, odors emanating from the bodies of unwashed humanity, tightly packed throughout the cathedral. Men who had perhaps never come to worship since their baptism, knelt on their *serapes* on the aged floors, their heads bowed, their right hands ever and anon making the sign of the cross before their motionless bodies. Women were everywhere, among the men, and some there were who carried newborn babes at their breasts.

I strode through the crowd, and men and women leaned to right and left to let me pass. But they did not look up, though they sensed that I was an outlander, and gave me that right of way which I had come to expect as my due.

JUST what I intended I did not know myself. I wished to warn these people—of something. To explain to them, from my fund of scientific knowledge, that they were frightening themselves needlessly, allowing senseless superstition to take possession of souls which their brains should have commanded. That, I suppose, is what I intended, for I moved forward until I was almost in the vanguard of the worshippers, where I turned to regard the simple natives.

But they were not all peons! Here and there, kneeling among the rest, I saw aristocratic señoritas, black *mantillas* draped over high-backed combs glistening with brilliants. I was amazed at this, but even more so to see, among the silent crowds, Spanish business men crossing themselves devoutly with the rest of the people.

And then I raised my hand to speak.

As though my gesture had been a signal, every head among the worshippers was lifted, every eye ptered at me—and there was fear in the depths of every one! Why? Why? What was there about me to cause fear?

Then I saw that they did not look at me, but through and over me, as though they stared at something high above me, and behind. And, a new dread taking possession of me, I turned, seeking what they saw. I turned slowly and heavily, as though only an indomitable will had made the turning possible.

For a moment I did not see it. Later I wondered why, since it was all so plain.

**R**IGHT before my eyes, and before the staring eyes of the worshippers, that part of the cathedral opposite the open door was slowly disintegrating, fading away, as a picture fades on the screen. And, like a picture still, there grew out of the ruins of that portion of the cathedral another picture, thin and frail as a fairy gossamer.

It was a picture of another place of worship. A place of worship which had been old before the cornerstone of this cathedral had been laid.

It was dim, true, and unreal; but unmistakable.

There was the *teocalli*, with the low-roofed sanctuaries squatting on the pyramidal crest. There was the statue, faint, but its outlines visible and traceable, of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war! There were the priests, their long hair flying rearward over their mantles, their right hands grasping the knives of sacrifice, gazing into the eye of an invisible sun, their left hands holding forth the offering to the oldest god of them all—and the offering was a human heart!

But, and I thanked God for that, there were mists whirling about the feet of the priests, mists which swirled and eddied to the heights of their waists, hiding from view the block of sacrifice—and the hideous things I knew we would have seen had the swirling mists not been there to cloak them.

Just a moment I saw it, and it must have been more than a dream, for I knew that every worshipper in the cathedral saw it too. Then the vision had vanished, like smoke that is blown away by the wind; and through the smoke, coming out of it swiftly as though to aid in banishing the horror of the scene, appeared the cathedral once again in its entirety!

And bedlam was suddenly unloosed in the house of worship!

**I** TURNED and looked back. Men and women were rocking from side to side. The *serapes*, which had been placed on the floor to save tender knees from the harsh hardness of the stones, were lifted and used to cover the faces of the devotees, and through these singular coverings, rising like the sound of an approaching wave, came the lamentations of the kneeling people.

*"Ai, Dios! Madre de Maria! Virgen madre de Jesus! Guardese sus suplicantes!"*

And so I left them there, wailing, while I made my way to the street, surprised to find, when I had passed through the doorway of the cathedral, that I was running at top speed.

For a deep-rooted conviction, not yet well enough analyzed to be a conviction in the usual sense, had taken possession of me. . . .

Somehow, some way, I was responsible for the terror which stalked through the streets of the city of Mexico! This terror that overshadowed all the land, that squatted like a hideous vulture at the crest of Chapultepec, and that went with the devotees of worshippers into the temples of their gods!

And so, as I ran, I called on my own God, whom I had many times denied—called on Him in voiceless whispers—begging Him to show me the way, to take upon Himself a little of the burden I had unwittingly shouldered.

How did I realize this responsibility?

**A**MONG the priests in that eery vision in the heart of the cathedral, proud and haughty, taking no part in the sacrifice, yet with the very spirit of him commanding it, and approving every brutality, I had gazed for a single instant into the bronze features of Guatemozin the Indian! He had been once more decked out regally in his square *tzimatl* of snow-white cotton, with the

*panache* of greenish plumes hanging down his straight back!

It was unbelievable. Yet every worshipper in the cathedral had seen the vision. But, had they all, as had I, seen the face of Guatemozin? Had they seen his firm lips shape themselves into a distorted vengeful smile? I didn't think so. I hoped they hadn't, yet feared they had.

But I had other things to do. It required many hours. But I went to the homes of each of the six who had died, demanding to see the marks on the left breast of each. I was granted admission. I saw, and was convinced, impossible as it appeared.

I returned to my hotel, dazed, not knowing what to think.

The manager of the hotel had the evening paper. He showed it to me without a word, because he did not grasp its meaning. I read, nor did I understand, though dread settled upon me again and would not leave me.

Sometime during the night just passed, the night whose shrouding darkness had hidden the death of the six aristocrats, the statue of Huitzilopochtli had disappeared from the *Museo Nacional*!

**I**N every church in the Capital City, save the cathedral which I had entered, at almost the same hour of the day, a strange figure had appeared out of nowhere to stand for a moment, silently, his face and eyes a bronze mask of accusation, in the very midst of the worshippers! The figure, the story said, had worn a square *títmatli* of white, yellowish-white cotton, and the head had been adorned with a *panache* of greenish plumes! The figure had stood, been noted, and vanished—no one knew where or how.

I saw something different in the story than the manager had seen. He was thinking only of the madman who had followed me into the hotel last evening. I was thinking. . . .

But I scarce knew what to think.

I do not believe I was surprised when I entered my room.

Guatemozin was gone. So were the vestments in which I had first found him.

And the modern clothing I had purchased for him lay in a heap before his vacant chair!

## CHAPTER IV

### *Drum of the War-God*

**I** COULD no longer deny my responsibility. The absence of Guatemozin, whom I had forbidden to leave the room, stunned me with its import. I slumped down on the side of my bed, dazed, bewildered. Here was something outside my scientific knowledge, something that no rule I had ever learned could account for or explain.

Guatemozin had gone, certainly, dressed in his robes of rank, and it was not too much to believe that he might have wandered into one of the many churches in the city. And the superstitious natives seeing him, with the knowledge of last night's dreadful happenings fresh in their minds, had spread the story of his appearance. The story had grown, as stories grow in Latin America, all out of proportion in its hurried passage from mouth to mouth, so that his appearances in more than one place at the same identical moment was a foregone conclusion. Your Latin American believes in the supernatural, even though it is a figment of his own ignorant brain.

So I told myself, and still was not satisfied with my explanation.

That vision I had seen in the cathedral I had visited the night before.

How could I explain that? In the light of certain thoughts that persisted in obtruding themselves upon my mind, I was beginning to believe that I, at least, could hazard a guess at the significance of the vi-

sion. For the *teocalli* of the Aztec god of war, if legend and history spoke truly, had once stood on the very ground now occupied by the cathedral.

**Y**ET the conclusion, inescapable as it seemed, appeared silly, even as it thrust itself forcibly home in my consciousness.

But where was Guatemozin? Who was Guatemozin? What had become of the body that should have rested in the sarcophagus of the long dead chieftain—Guatemozin?

My brain whirled with dreadful thoughts. A ghastly belief in something I knew to be utter impossibility was entering into and abiding with me. I was a scientist whose science was failing me. I was but the equal, after all, of the humblest peon in all Mexico, naming supernatural the things I could not understand or explain.

I sat on the bed, my head in my hands, while perspiration bathed my body until my clothes were damp with it. I forgot my raging fever. I forgot my treasure house, except to curse the unnamable something its opening had unleashed upon Mexico. I forgot everything. . . .

Everything except Guatemozin, the mysterious, the impossible—who even now was somewhere in the city, stalking through unfamiliar streets like a composite ghost of all the vanished Aztecs.

Like a flash came back to me the inscription I had read on the tomb of the chieftain in my dream!

"I am Guatemozin, and my spirit watches forever over the destinies of Tenochtitlán!"

Tenochtitlán! Capital City of the Montezumas, rulers of all Anáhuac! Tenochtitlán! Upon whose ruins had risen this very city in which I now sojourned. I prayed my God for an explanation that would not drive me mad!

I remembered dully that I had not

eaten. I sent for food. The sight of it nauseated me, and I sent it back untasted.

**I** FLUNG myself down on my bed, but found no rest for body or spirit. What could I do to undo the trouble I had caused? How could I avert the catastrophe which I felt to be threatening the City of Mexico? Catastrophe?

I shuddered. I had read too much of history. I was remembering always, since the departure of Guatemozin, that even when Tenochtitlán had finally fallen, and the defeated remnants of what had been a mighty horde of Aztecs had left the city according to the terms of the surrender, even the babes in arms had shaken tiny fists at the victorious Conquistadores. The Aztecs had been defeated, and their doom was sealed; yet their spirits were unquenched. Even then, they might have turned back for a final attack upon the white murderers had not starvation rendered them unable to lift their blood-rusted weapons.

I had read, though had not believed, that the spirits of those who had died by violence, with snarls of hate on their lips, with murder in their hearts, were beld in thrall, earthbound, crying out through unrequited ages for vengeance.

Could it be possible. . . .

My door opened. The hair at the base of my skull rustled

**B**UT it was not Guatemozin who entered.

It was the hotel manager, his usually swarthy face gray as ashes with fear, and behind him, entering my room affrightedly, as though to take comfort from my presence, came his servitors—his waiters, and his chambermaids.

"Your pardon, señor," said the manager hoarsely, "for our intrusion. But we labor under deadly fear. The city is as silent as a church,

and clouds hang ominously over Chapultapeo—and they are motionless. We are afraid, señor, and beg that you will not drive us away."

Oddly enough, the fear of these people caused a little of my own to vanish. I saw that they were indeed afraid, with a fear that was almost deadly, that robbed them of the power of speech—save only the manager, who would have talked on the hangman's scaffold.

"But what can I do, Don Julio?" I asked.

Surreptitiously, hoping that they did not notice, I wiped the perspiration from my forehead.

"You can talk to us," he said. "You can help us sit the night away."

"But why do you not take to your rooms, so that sleep may make the hours like fleeting minutes?"

"Do you forget," was the soft reply, "that the six who died passed away during the hours of darkness—presumably while they slept? No, friend, there will be no sleep for us. The monster who is causing this shadow which hovers over us will not harm you, and we are safe at your side."

"The monster? What do you mean?"

"The man in the white robe and the head-dress of green plumes!"

I started as the manager put my own thoughts into words.

"But why do you call him monster? And why should I escape the doom which you believe he is bringing to Mexico City?"

THE reply came from an unexpected quarter, from one of the chambermaids. She was a half-witted negress, who passed her days away as the butt of jokes originated by her fellow employees of the hotel. I turned as she spoke. The girl had been squatting on her haunches just inside my door, mumbling to herself, speaking in the bastard Spanish which is the language of the poor.

Saliva left dirty foam on her thick lips, and her eyes gazed away into space as though she saw nothing save distance, through even the stout walls of the hostelry, as though she were under the spell of some weird self-hypnosis. But when she spoke it was not the voice of the half-wit, and the manager jumped and muttered curses, while his remaining employees rocked to and fro, their eyes wide with terror.

"He will not harm you, señor—because you delivered him from bondage!"

I gasped, and perspiration bathed my body anew. The girl spoke with calm conviction, as one having authority. She believed what she said, and though it filled us all with breathless awe, we believed her, too. I gulped frantically, searching my aching brain for words, unwilling to lose poise for an instant in the presence of people whom I looked upon as far below me in all things. But before I could speak the negress, rocking to and fro, still with her eyes gazing into space, wide and staring, spoke again, her voice a monotonous singsong that chilled the spines of all who heard her.

"THE blood of the people of Anáhuac cries out for vengeance," she intoned. "I hear the sound come forth from every vanished *asotea*. I hear it thunder over all the land from the *teocallis* of the Aztec gods. I hear the vanished people chanting their war-cries. I hear the whispers in the wind. Out of the past, along the corridors of centuries, the wailing of the vanished dead come down to me—as ghostly hands reach down for vengeance across the space of half a thousand years! The dead who died by violence have wandered over their ravished strongholds, uneasy yet powerless to work their will, because they lacked a greater will to lead them. *That leader has been found, and the*

shades of those whom the white men destroyed are massing for the conflict. Mexico is doomed! She has grown fat with the passing of the centuries, fat with that which is born of greed and idleness! I see the dead of to-day, of to-morrow, of many to-morrows, lying thickly in the silent streets—and there are livid crimson marks upon the bodies of them all!”

The negress paused in her chanting—for it was a chant—singsong words, as though she repeated something she had learned, parrot-like, by rote. Her Spanish was faultless; this from an uneducated woman who could neither write her name nor count the sheets she laundered. The manager was tottering on his feet, his lips moving without sound. He swayed toward the girl, his trembling hand lifted to strike—the motive for the act going back perhaps to long-dead rulers in the Old World, who slew the bearers of evil tidings. But I stayed him with lifted hand, searching the set face of the half-wit.

“Wait!”

**F**OR the lips of the negress were moving again, as unaccustomed words strove to get through.

“I hear the whispers in the wind,” she said.

And, softly lest I disturb her, I put a question—a statement that was more question than statement.

“But there is no wind.”

The hand of the negress lifted, beseeching silence.

“Hark!” she said.

And we all grew statue-like to listen.

From outside, muted by distance, but unmistakable, came the sound as of a high wind approaching! High and whining wind, like the voice of a hurricane, growing louder and more menacing as the moments passed into Eternity, taking with them the last vestiges of our hopes.

I saw the natives lick dry, parched lips with stiffening tongues. We listened, though, unable to move or cry out, as the wind swung into the Vale of Anáhuac and swooped down upon the City of Mexico like a horde of avenging angels. Far away, as the vanguard of the wind struck the edge of the city, we could hear the doors of houses that were not already locked bang shut, while the shutters on distant windows banged like the clatter of machine guns. Through the wind, mere threads of every sound, came the shrieks of people who groveled behind their doors, and prayed in frenzy to the god they trusted.

I lifted my hand again, and the moaning of the manager and his employees stilled as at a signal.

“Who are you, woman?” I asked the half-wit negress, softly.

“I?” she questioned, and her eyes did not once meet my own. “I am Maria de Estrada!”

**I** STARTED again, and looked at the manager. And, realizing that I mutely asked a question, he shook his head.

“Her name,” he declared, “is Dominga Tatis.”

“And her family,” I pressed, “is it old? Is she descended from any great ones of the city’s past?”

The manager shrugged his shoulders and pursed his wan lips.

“Who knows the bloods which course through the veins of the gutter-mongrels?” he said.

“But there may be blood in her from the aristocracy, remote though the connection may have been?”

Again he shrugged his shoulders. Maria de Estrada!

There had been a Maria de Estrada with Malinche upon his evacuation of Tenochtitlán, and the Amazonian woman, if legend did not lie, had wielded a broadsword as valiantly as any man, hewing her own way through the Aztec hordes.

But now the woman spoke again. "Hark!" she said.

The wind was all about us now, possessing all the city, striving to thrust cold fingers in upon us through the shaking shutters of my room. But, how I know not, I knew that what she heard was not the wind—and there was nothing but the wind to hear. The ears of her strange new being had caught at some sound even through the wind, and none of us had captured it as yet. And I knew before I heard it that the icy hand of dread would close a little tighter upon the hearts of every one of us.

"What is it, Maria?" I questioned.

"The great drum of the god of war!" she chanted.

**T**HEN, when the wind died down for the briefest of moments, I heard it—a mighty paean of dreadful warning.

Boom! Boo-oom! Boom!

Slow measured strokes, delivered by an invisible hand, that set all the atmosphere to vibrating, as the sound rolled out of the night, through the hull of the wind, in volume vast enough to bridge even the weary miles to Puebla, to Jalapa, and Vera Cruz.

The great drum of the god of war!

What else was needed to complete the terror which was ours? We felt the hand of death come close upon us, opening and closing, as though to clutch us to its breast.

Boom! Boo-oom! Boom!

And then the wind came back, wiping the sound away, as wind steals the song from the lips of the singer.

But I knew!

I could hear the sound roll down the centuries, four of them, each an hundred years of time, each greater than the lifetime of any normal man. Of all that frightened company I alone felt that I knew the significance of the voice of the great drum of the Aztec god.

For when Tenochtitlán had been

the wonder city of Anáhuac, there had been a drum in the heart of the *teocalli* of Huizililopochtli with a voice like that. . . .

And its voice was heard only when great and dire calamity threatened the golden kingdom of the Aztecs!

"Maria!" I said. "Maria!"

"I hear," she said.

"Tell me, woman, who am I?"

**S**HE did not look at me, but she had heard my question, for her black brows were knitted in thought. I fancied, oddly, that I could see a fairer skinned woman, behind that blackness, dressed in shining mail, with a broadsword in her hand!

"You . . . you. . . ." She hesitated in her answer for the first time since I had asked her questions. "You are . . . no! No! You are not Malinche!"

Of course I wasn't; but for me there was inspiration in what she said. My fear fell from me like a cloak discarded, and I found myself standing, looking down upon these people who put their trust in me.

"But I am!" I said—and laughed at my own absurdity. "I am Malinche—if only until this calamity which threatens has safely passed. And you," pointing to the manager, "are Alvarado! Mine is the place to command, yours the duty to obey. These others here, my Alvarado, are soldiers of the King! Take them, Alvarado, and lead them forth—and when you find this Guatemozin, and Maria will lead you to him, take him and bind him with chains, and bring him captive to me!"

The manager stiffened as I gave my orders, and his ashen face became a shade more nearly approximating my own whiteness of skin. But into my words he read a deep significance, comprehended a little of the vastness, yea, and the hopelessness, of my plan. He straightened, looked me squarely in the face, and his hand half lifted, as though



he would have saluted his commander. He faced about, and his men servants with him.

The door leaped open under his hand, closed behind him, and only the whimpering women, save Maria, who, still as one in a trance, had led the way for her master, remained in the room with me.

My own plans were bazy at best. But this I knew. I must go to the cleft I had made beyond the outskirts of the Capital City. I must go even though the storm, in all its fury, tear me limb from limb—and there, in the heart of the tomb, I must find a way to frustrate the vengeance of Guatemozin. There must be a way, and if any there be, mine must be the will to find it. That much I owed the land of my sojourn—for my desire for knowledge which is not found in books had been the cause of the terror which stalked by night through the Capital City!

**I** OWED a debt, and even though its payment might be tardy, and could not give back the lives of the six who had gone, I still must make that payment if there yet were time.

Having somewhat persuaded the cowering women that there was no longer any danger, I dismissed them, and they huddled out of the room to congregate elsewhere.

I turned toward the bed, seeking heavier clothing, knowing that an icy chill was in the wind outside, because its breath came through the shutters with each roaring gust that passed my bedroom window. I turned, and halted, wavering, listening.

It was not the drum I heard. It was not a voice. But deep within me spoke a still small voice of warning.

"Stay, friend! Stay! We have no quarrel with you—yet!"

I brushed my hand over my eyes, dazed and wondering.

I turned again and looked about me. I was not in my bedroom, nor

was I standing erect. I was lying at an angle, slumped down on a stony spiral stairway, against one step of which my head had struck in falling. I remembered now—and wondered where lay the borderline between reality and dreadful dreams!

I rolled to my side and looked behind me.

There was the door of the sanctuary in which I had fallen, and through it I saw the sunlight of the out-of-doors—and beyond the doorway, unmarred by rail or battlement, I beheld the edge of the *teocalli*, with only yawning space below!

I staggered erect, my right hand going to the wound my head had got in falling, and moved toward the door, dazedly, as one who dreams. I had thought the sound which I heard to be the thumping of unbearable pain inside my aching head; but on the instant I knew that this was not true.

It was the calamitous booming of the war-god's drum! The toneless chanting of a myriad of people! Out of the Fourth Dimension I had come a second time—to listen, to observe. . . .

And to avert catastrophe!

## CHAPTER V

### *Night of Doom*

**I**T is odd perhaps that when I dreamed I could recall all that had happened to me since the coming into my life of the mad Guatemozin; odder still that when I was awake I remembered my terrible dreams in every detail. It was as though I did not dream at all. It was as though, by a miraculous transition, I moved from one sphere into another, almost at will, or rather, whether or not I willed it. When I was awake I was a scientist in the year 1931; when I dreamed I was an observer in ancient Tenochtitlán, of over four hundred years ago—and between the dream and the reality there was no

passage of time, and I could not tell one from the other. I closed my eyes on modern Mexico City and was in ancient Tenochtitlán, and I returned to Mexico City by closing them again.

I will not try to explain this, for I cannot.

And then, too, there was the connecting link between two periods in history so widely separated.

Guatemozin? But the real Guatemozin was dead, and the other Guatemozin was a madman.

So I told myself; but it was as though I addressed myself in some black cavern, where echoes came out of the darkness to mock my words.

I had fallen, in the first dream, and bumped my head on a stairway. I had regained consciousness on the identical spot many hours later, and during that passage of hours I had been a scientist in the heart of the City of Mexico, separated from the observer in Tenochtitlán by almost half a thousand years.

My brain reeled as I strove for explanations that were logical.

**T**HEN, knowing by previous experience that the people of old Tenochtitlán would heed me not, I passed through the door of the sanctuary, and wended my way through the butcher-priests before the statue of the hideous Aztec god of war. I stood on the edge of the *teocalli*, gazing out across the Vale of Anáhuac, with the golden city of Tenochtitlán at my feet.

For now I knew the city, and knew that, could the observer in Tenochtitlán but have seen with the eyes of the scientist of 1931, I should have been able to perceive, superimposed upon Tenochtitlán, coinciding with it throughout, yet larger by far—the modern City of Mexico! I could not see it, for I stood on the *teocalli* in the heart of Tenochtitlán, and the City of Mexico was as yet undreamed of.

A nightmare of paradoxes. Yes, what else could I think?

Stretching away from me in all directions was the aged city whose secrets I had sought to read in the ruins where I had discovered the mad Guatemozin. There were the canals and waterways, with the bright sun turning their waters to pathways of shimmering gold. Up and down the pathways, riding in state in *píraguas* of many sizes and designs, were countless thousands of the people who ruled Anáhuac before the Spaniards came. And they were not ghosts, for ghosts are not of the flesh, and do not sing in the voices of the living. They were living people, little statues in bronze, and their chanting rolled like a flood of sound throughout the Vale of Anáhuac.

They lived! I was gazing upon the Tenochtitlán of Montezuma, the Tenochtitlán which was the city Cortés first knew, before his mailed fists and heavy heels destroyed it, putting *azoteas* to the torch, and tearing asunder the stones from the *teocallis* and the sanctuaries; before he had trod through the ancient city, with the flaming torch of massacre.

**B**UT on the crest of the *teocalli* on which I stood, its thunderous diapason causing my body to tremble with the evil of its import, throbbed and thundered the great drum which spoke to all Anáhuac of approaching calamity! What was the expected calamity, and whence would it come?

I had not long to wait, and that which next occurred told me that I had made a slight error when I had thought this to be Tenochtitlán before the Spaniards came. For Cortés had been here, and had gone. And when I saw, coming up the winding stairway, a group of white soldiers in shining mail, I knew that Alvarado led his soldiers to the crest of the *teocalli* to witness the Aztec annual

festival in honor of the war-god—and that Cortés was absent from the city to settle his score with Pánfilo de Narvaez.

I had read history, and knew what to expect. Yet I knew that no warning I could give would avert the calamity which was descending upon the Aztecs with the apparently friendly approach of Alvarado. For, though this thing had already happened—back in the City of Mexico—four hundred years ago, it had not yet, in this place, come to pass. I would have been changing the course of history already written had I been able to give the warning I knew that none would heed.

**T**HE Aztecs, in all their gala finery, assembled, six hundred and more of them, and lost themselves at once in dancing, chanting, and their strange discordant minstrelsy, while Alvarado and his soldiers looked on amusedly.

The Aztecs were oblivious to Alvarado and his soldiers, whom they regarded as friends.

And Alvarado and his men, as I had known they would do, when there seemed no danger to themselves, because the Aztecs were unarmed and wore no armor, fell upon the celebrants with drawn swords. They cut them down with savage brutality, with neither pity nor compunction. Those who fled downward to the gates of the *teocalli's* courtyard were caught upon the pikes of soldiers who stood guard without, and the massacre was complete.

The Aztecs were dismayed by the catastrophe, and I could understand why, on the instant, they had grown to hate the Spaniards with a hate that would never die.

Then, over the heads of the multitudes who had just witnessed the slaughter of the very flower of Aztec nobility, I saw the outer gates of Tenochtitlán, where Cortés, having

defeated Narvaez and won over his soldiers, was just returning to make good his conquest of Anáhuac.

The utter and heartless brutality of Alvarado had brought catastrophe, and the throbbing of the drum of the war-god was the answer of the Aztecs. So that Cortés, returning as he thought to find a peaceful Tenochtitlán in which he might rest for a while after his conquest of Narvaez, was greeted with sounds of tumult such as he had never heard before.

**I** KNEW how he had met Alvarado, and had expressed his displeasure at what the butcher had done. But Cortés was a soldier, as was Alvarado, and his sympathies, whatever his displeasure, must certainly be with Alvarado.

Montezuma, then, was no longer Cortés' host, but his prisoner, and Tenochtitlán with all its priceless treasures was given to the Spanish looters.

The city rose in arms as the Spaniards hurried into their defenses, and Tenochtitlán was beginning its hopeless effort to drive back the invaders to the sea. Cortés and his men had looted the Aztec temples, had made Montezuma, whom his people worshipped as divine, a prisoner. Few there were of all the Aztecs who had not suffered insults at the red hands of the Conquistadores.

Cortés, entering the city warily, wondering mightily at the coolness of his reception, was not long left in doubt. He reached his defenses and joined his comrades in arms.

In the meantime a veritable flood of Aztec warriors, who could never forgive the treachery of Alvarado, filled all Tenochtitlán, laying siege to the defenses of the Great White Captain, Malinche.

And I? I stood on the crest of the *teocalli*, a visitor from the future, and watched a doomed nation sell its life-blood dearly.

Then, like a picture on the screen, events followed each upon the heels of the other with indescribable celerity—events between whose occurrence I knew there had been lapses of many hours if history did not lie.

THE Aztecs pressed right up to the base of the Spanish stronghold, and arrows and lances, each dispatched upon its mission of death on the sender's prayer to whatever gods were his, were a veritable cloud across the sky. Those weapons were sent with the genius of those who knew the art of war, and their sharpened points sought out the very joints and weaknesses in the armor of the Spaniards. The Aztecs, when the white men answered their fire, fell before the Spanish stronghold in scores and hundreds, until the piles of their bodies were everywhere. Yet over the piles, each Aztec pushed forward his brother-in-arms in rear, and the tide of battle flowed all about the defenses of Cortés. Montezuma, a fine figure of a regal chieftain, Cortés' prisoner, appeared upon the battlements and, with arms outstretched in protest, begged his warriors to desist—if only because they wished to see him live. And, even though his own people cried out upon him, calling him a traitor to his land, they loved him still, and drew away.

But they had not given up their revenge. They sat down before the Spanish stronghold and prepared to let starvation work its will with the white murderers.

And behind me, at the crest of the *teocalli* of Huitzilopochtli, boomed and rolled the thunder of the great drum of calamity!

It was only a respite. Cortés could not hold his position in the face of starvation and knew it, and though I could not see through the walls of his defenses, I knew that, with the drawing back of the Aztec hordes, the Great White Captain had gathered his officers about him to dis-

cuss the retreat from his beleaguered castle.

AFTER a time the Great Captain himself, whom I knew from the *bauteur* of his carriage, came to the crest of his battlements and asked to bold converse with the enemy. The chosen representatives of the Aztecs, under arms, approached the stronghold to talk with Malinche—and Malinche's words were the fatal error that ushered in catastrophe. I could see him there plainly, and his words came clearly across to me.

"This," he said, "have you brought upon yourselves by your rebellion. If you do not lay down your arms and return once more to your obedience, I will make of your city a heap of ruins, and leave not a soul alive to mourn over it!"

I moved closer to the *teocalli's* crest to hear the answer of the spokesman. Proudly, disdain for his enemy in his face, the Aztec leader made reply.

"It is true, Malinche, what you say. You have destroyed our temples, broken our gods in pieces, and our countrymen have fallen before your soldiers like ripe grain before the hail. And others yet will fall, perhaps—but we will give a thousand lives, and give them gladly, to take the life of a single white man! Look about you, at our terraces, along our streets. They are thronged with warriors as far as your eyes can see. Our forces are scarcely diminished, while your own force is lessening hour by hour. You die of hunger and sickness. You have no water or provisions. You are doomed, Malinche! We have destroyed the bridges which you must cross to gain your freedom—and there will be all too few of you to glut the vengeance of our gods!"

A hail of arrows from the Aztecs put an end to the truce, and the Spaniards took refuge in their de-

fenses. The Aztecs then drew back to sit like cats before mouse-holes, knowing that Cortés and his men were trapped.

THE great drum behind me grew silent, as did all the city, bringing in a great feeling of depression and expectation—a sensation which reminded me of that vast depression I had left behind me in the City of Mexico.

The Vale of Anáhuac was waiting, while within the stronghold, Cortés was preparing his forces to begin the retreat.

"The melancholy night" was approaching.

It was difficult for me to grasp it all, as may well be imagined.

I knew that when night came in Tenochtitlán it would be daylight in Mexico, and vice versa. And that I had but to sleep a moment to return to the city of my sojourn.

And night, silent, imponderable, menacing as a great cat preparing to spring, descended upon Tenochtitlán. There now were no Aztecs on the *teocalli* on whose crest I stood, save only a few who stood, or slept, within the sanctuary at my back. But there was one, immovable as a statue, who took his stance before the great war drum of the Aztecs, hand uplifted, ready to send the dreadful summons pealing forth.

Silence everywhere, as though everyone waited, with bated breath.

Suddenly I saw the men of Cortés come forth like ghosts, the staunch mail glistening through the darkness, flecks of eery light flashing on bared weapons held in readiness. One by one, moving silently, they came out upon the causeways, the horses prancing side by side, their heavy hoofs ringing like the clash of cold steel on a frosty morning, while in the van, protecting the helpless sick and wounded, marched the foot-soldiers, and they too had their weapons poised.

THEY reached the end of the first causeway, to find that it had been destroyed and that a great gap separated the white men from the safety of the mainland; and this breach was watched by Aztec sentries, who raised shrill cries of alarm at the first sight of the silent Spaniards.

Instantly, from behind me, so suddenly that I started and almost fell from the crest of the *teocalli*, burst the thunderous rolling of the drum of all calamity!

The silent city of Tenochtitlán became history's most awful bedlam. From everywhere, gliding out of the darkness near at hand and from afar, Aztec warriors in canoe and *piragua* broke into view. While their harsh cries went winging across all Anáhuac, the intrepid Indians made for the causeway from all directions, while their arrows and lances fell among the Spaniards like hail.

Many of the Spaniards crossed that breach in that first causeway; yet many more remained there, broken and dying, or already dead, their very bodies filling the breach to form a bridge to safety for Cortés and his soldiers who survived.

But this was only the beginning. There were many causeways yet to traverse, and each had been broken and destroyed to cut off the retreat of Malinche and his brutal follower, Alvarado. Hundreds and thousands of Aztecs met the Spaniards at each breach, clung to them, fighting, on the remnants of the causeways, hurled lances at them from *azoteas* near and far, filled the sky of night with clouds of hurtling arrows. Hundreds and thousands of the Aztecs paid for their bravery with their lives, and other hundreds, other thousands, came out of the darkness to take the places of the fallen.

It was more than human strength could bear; yet the Aztecs bore it, and so did the Spaniards, because they must either bear or perish.

**B**UT history has already told the story, and we know that Cortés won his way to Popotla with a handful of his men. While the Aztecs drew off to gather up the spoils Malinche had left behind him in retreat, the white men were granted a breathing space, and Cortés was given time to reckon up his losses.

They were many, and the proud Cortés forgot his pride to weep in sorrow as his soldiers, with blank places in their files to right and left, marched past him, leaving Tenochtitlán, unconquered, for the time being.

*La noche triste*, the night of sadness, had come and gone, and in Tenochtitlán death and destruction were everywhere. In Popotla, sorrow already forgotten, Cortés was planning his return, and the utter destruction of the Aztecs.

The drum behind me was silent, with the silence of death.

And from out of the heart of Tenochtitlán, up to where I stood, came a never-to-be-forgotten odor—the odor of decaying flesh, of moldering mortality—like the breath from a fetid tomb that has been closed for centuries.

Yet, knowing history, I knew that this was not the end; that Malinche would return to make good his promise to leave Tenochtitlán a heap of ruins. I could see the Spanish conqueror coming back with fresh troops to spread death and destruction through all Anáhuac.

And so I understood the horror of it all, the madness, the desire for revenge that had outlived the centuries, and wondered if the glory of conquest was worth the price, and if that vengeance which was even now reaching into the modern City of Mexico was justified.

For Mexico City, to the Aztec of Tenochtitlán, would be a symbol of the golden glory he had lost to ancestors of these very people who trod the newer city's streets!

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Pestilence*

**W**HEN I awoke in my hotel room it was almost midday. I had fallen asleep with my clothes on, just exactly as I had stood to give my orders to "Alvarado"—with one difference in detail. Upon my feet I wore those sandals with the golden soles!

Even then I suppose I should have slept on, had it not been that the manager of the hotel, more frightened by far than he had been when last I saw him, stood over me and shook me. He had been shaking me for many minutes, his fear mounting as the moments fled, for perspiration was all over his ashen face.

"Wake up," he begged. "Wake up, for the love of God!"

I arose to a sitting position, tired and sleepy. I hadn't slept, really slept, in many hours.

"What is it, Don Julio?" I asked.

"You sent us out last night," he quavered, "to bring to you the monster in the white robe and head-dress of plumes. The half-wit girl who called herself Maria de Estrada led us right to him. We saw him, went and stood close to him, commanding him to surrender. He made no reply. He merely looked at us, and our blood turned to water—save only that of the half-wit girl. She ran to him, both hands upraised as though she poised a broadsword to slash the man in twain. As she approached the eyes of the monster stared straight into hers, and only his eyes were visible, like candles all but hidden in deepest of sockets.

"He held his white robe about his face, as though to prevent recognition—as if one could forget, ever, the man in square *titmatli* and *panache* of plumes! But as the mad-dened half-wit girl came close to him, and he retreated not a single step, he dropped his mantle from his face, and, as God is my witness, it

was not a face we saw—but a grinning human skull! And the finger he pointed at Maria was bare of flesh, as was the arm protruding from the square *titmatli*! Only his eyes were alive, redly glowing within the depths of his skull."

DON JULIO paused in his mad narrative, and his breathing came harshly from his gasping lips.

"And then?" I prompted.

"And then there came out of his grinning mouth a stream of words which I shall never forget—and he called the girl by the name which she gave you: 'Back, Maria, for there is none in all the earth who can deny the Aztec gods their vengeance! Back, if you would save your foolish life!' Maria paused a moment, but I doubt if, mad as she was, she noticed that his face was but a grinning skull, and his hands were fleshless bones of a skeleton. She took one step, even while his arm was still raised, pointing at her—and before her advancing foot touched the ground, the half-wit girl fell as though she had been struck. She spun about on her one foot, to fall, face downward, with her head toward us.

"We would have fled, but we were courageous even in our fear. We strode to the girl and turned her over on her back. She had been dead but a single instant, yet there emanated from her the dank, fetid odor of a charnel house that has been long unopened! It was an odor like that which came into the hotel with you that evening when you brought with you the mad stranger in the white robe and head-dress of plumes! As we looked down at her her face became mottled—a dead black face in which brown, unhealthy spots began to form, spots like huge and ugly freckles! We left her there, for there was nothing we could do, señor, and came back to you—and I have tried for half an hour to waken you!"

DON JULIO straightened as I slipped from my bed, seeking my shoes. As I put them on, hurling the golden-soled sandals from me, the manager of the hotel looked all about him, his nostrils twitching.

"It is here!" he burst out suddenly. "It is here in this room!"

"What is here?" I demanded harshly, my heart sinking even lower than before.

"That odor," he said, trembling, "that odor which clung to the newly-dead body of Dominga Tatis! Can't you detect it, like a breath from an aged tomb?"

I shivered. Well I knew that odor. I had experienced it when my treasure house had been opened; I had known it when, from the *teocalli* of my dreams, I had gazed across the ravaged ruins of Tenochtitlán after Cortés had made his escape to Popotla, leaving the piles of Aztec dead behind him. It was the odor of decaying human flesh. I had known the odor when I had been a medico in France; but the odor here was different, somehow, as though the dead had been longer dead. Yet just a trace it was, like the lingering odor of perfums. Like an intangible something which hovered in the corner of my room, invisible, yet reaching fingers of decay outward to touch us all. I shook myself violently.

"Where," I asked Don Julio, "is Guatemozin? Where was he when you found him, and Maria died? That is nonsense about the grinning skull, the fleshless arms and hands; you dreamed it all. Guatemozin is as much alive as I am. Dominga Tatis was a half-wit, and probably subject to fits. She had one of them, induced by fright, and it killed her."

"But those spots on her face!" persisted Julio.

"You were so badly scared that your imagination ran away with you, Don Julio," I said, and tried to smile, though something inside me said that I lied. "But answer my questions."

"**W**HERE the madman is now, I know not. But we found him in the huge market-place at the edge of the city, where traders from the hill country, having come in early to get the morning trade, were sleeping near their stalls and among their produce."

"And what was he doing when you found him?"

"He was stalking in silence among them, stooping over each of the sleepers, as though he scanned their faces to see if he knew them."

"God! And you did not try to stop him?"

"What harm did he do? He touched not one of them—and I have told you what happened when we tried to take him."

"But you were armed, Don Julio. Why did you not shoot him?"

Here a quiver shook the frame of Don Julio.

"I tried, señor," he said, and his eyes grew big with fright. He gulped spasmodically, unable for a moment to go on.

"Yes?" I encouraged.

"I was aiming straight at his eyes," said Julio, "and I am accorded a good shot. Had I fired I must certainly have slain him."

"But you didn't fire?"

Don Julio nodded his head.

"I fired," he said dully, "and, as God is my witness, the bullet never left the muzzle of my piece. It must have exploded, for the force of it almost tore my arm from my body, and when I looked at my hand it was empty. The pistol had burst with the explosion and its pieces scattered to the four winds, and my hand was bleeding where a bit of metal had slashed it. Only the Virgin Mary must have saved me utterly from destruction."

"And the fact that your weapon burst must have filled you with such a superstitious fear of the mad Guatemoxin that you fancied all sorts of things: the grinning skull, the

fleshless arms, the huge brown spots on the face of Dominga Tatia."

"**N**O!" He all but shouted it. "I did not fire until we were fleeing from the market-place, after Dominga had fallen. I turned to look back. The madman was standing as he had stood to watch us approach, arms folded, square robe all but hiding his face. Uncontrollable anger brought me to pause, so that I knelt on the sidewalk, rested my elbow on my knee, and fired—and my weapon vanished from my hand as though I had never held it!"

"And now you think that the madman cannot be slain with bullets."

"I know it."

Three words, spoken with conviction, told me that Don Julio *did* know it, and that I was a fool if I insisted on branding his statement false.

"But there must be some way, Don Julio," I said, "for I tell you that, as sure as Mexico has risen from the ashes of Tenochtitlán, your city's inhabitants are doomed if we do not slay Guatemoxin!"

"But how, señor, how?"

Then I lifted my hand and made a vow.

"I shall slay Guatemoxin. I promise you, Julio, that I shall never sleep again until this madman, for whose coming I know myself responsible, is no more. He is to blame, and only his death will keep the people of Mexico City from going the way of Dominga—and those who slept in the market-place!"

"**A**ND those who slept in the market-place," gasped Julio, "you think. . ."

"I know," I said gently; "else why was the madman there at all? Tell me, Julio, what sort of people come to the market-place to peddle their wares?"

"Peons," he retorted, "most of them Indians from the hills."



"And Cortés came into Tenochtitlán with his Tlascalcan warriors at his back," I said half-aloud to myself, "'and with them were members of many other Indian tribes who had been enemies of the Aztecs for centuries.'"

"I do not understand you," said Julio.

"No need, Don Julio," I retorted, "you have enough to worry about as it is. I was just thinking, though, that the Aztecs had their Indian enemies to thank for the destruction of Tenochtitlán as much as the Conquistadores, and that wholesale vengeance must of necessity include the descendants of those self-same Indians, of whom the Tlascalans were the chief offenders."

I donned my clothes, jammed an automatic in a pocket, and hurried from the room.

"I am going, Don Julio," I said, "and if I do not return before midnight tonight, take a few of your friends to the spot beyond Chapultepec where I was excavating some of the ruins of old Tenochtitlán—and fill the cleft with the debris you will find at the mouth of the openings."

**I** DID not look behind me to see whether he had understood. I knew that my words must have filled him with amazement, must have added to his superstitious fear, the sum total of which was already almost beyond his power to bear.

Then I found myself on the street. I knew where to look for the marketplace about which Don Julio had told me, and turned my feet in that direction. I lowered my head as I strode along, seeking to cover my mouth with the lapels of my coat—for the odor I had encountered in the tomb of Guatemoxin seemed now to hover over all of Mexico City, like a ghastly pall, invisible, yet almost tangible. The black clouds of yesterday still hid the sun, and a wraith-

like mist, such as that which rises from heated pavements after a soaking rain, made all the houses on either hand seem dim and indistinct. Yet the mist seemed to be without substance. It swirled over everything, and its breath was that odor of the tomb; yet the mist was not one of dampness. It was more like drifting smoke; yet I knew it was not smoke. I didn't know what it was, save that it was one of the weapons of Guatemoxin, whom I was seeking.

I came to the market-place after a while, and found that here the smoky mist hung thickest. It hung over everything, blotting out all view. Dread such as I had never known possessed me. I hesitated, wondering whether to investigate the horror which I knew the mists kept hidden from the sight of man. No sound came from the market-place, though it was near noon, and the place should have been a bedlam of chattering tongues.

**S**ILENCE of the tomb hung over the place. I gripped my automatic, knowing even as I did so that any weapon was useless, and shut my eyes as, head down, I started into the creeping mist.

I stumbled and fell, and knew that my feet had come in contact with a human body. I knew this even before I found the courage to open my eyes and look. For there came to my nostrils, from near at hand, that fetid odor, speaking of long-dead and buried mortality.

I opened my eyes and looked, and screamed in spite of all I could do to keep silent—screamed again and again, in insane frenzy! For Don Julio had spoken the truth! Before me, in the person of the dead half-wit, Dominga Tatis, who had told me in her trance that she was María de Estrada, I saw the proof of the mad story.

A black face, whose flesh now was

drawn tightly over the bones of the skull, so tightly that the lips were drawn back in a mad grimace. A black face which was mottled to the roots of the hair, and down to where the flesh vanished into the sleazy clothing of the dead negress, with brownish, disfiguring blots—like huge, cankerous freckles!

I drew my automatic and, stooping as I rested on my knees beside the hideous body of the half-wit, I strove to pierce the gloom with smarting eyes, but to no avail.

Wearily, so numbed with fear and horror that I scarce could place one foot before the other, I rose from the body of Dominga Tatis, and strode into the mists. I sought that part of the market-place where I knew the marketers had been sleeping when Don Julio and his men had discovered Guatemozin.

AND as I reached that portion the smoky mist lifted for a few moments, as though my coming had been a signal to an invisible someone, and a ghastly hand had drawn back the mist-curtain so that I might see.

And before my eyes, startling me even though I had known what I would find, reposed dead marketers who had gone to sleep to await the morning's trade! Here, beside little heaps of beans, little piles of corn and rice, other piles of unrefined sugar, was a bedraggled woman gone to sleep forever. A dead baby was at her lifeless breast. Her hands, clasped even in death about her baby, were mottled with those great blots I had already seen on the face of the half-wit! Her face was mottled, too, and the skin was as taut as the head of the Aztec war drum, drawing her lips back from her tight-closed teeth in an eternal grimace.

But why continue? Why go into all the hideous details of this slaughter of the innocent marketers—innocent save that they were, some of

them, descended from a mingling of the blood of the Conquistadores with the blood of Tlescalans and other Indians who had revolted against the power of the vanished Aztecs?

Within the confines of that market-place, among the empty stalls, under the counters intended as repositories for country produce, I counted two hundred dead—men, women, and children—peons all, from the distant hills beyond Mexico City. The face of each and every one of them was mottled with the touch of that strange plague which had come into the city with the opening—by me, God help me!—of the tomb of Guatemozin.

## GUATEMOZIN. . .

Great God! He was the plague! He was the heart and soul of the plague, this madman who called himself Guatemozin—and he had but to show his face to living men to tell them where they stood, with those mottled splotches already showing on their faces as they fell! A grim visitant, this creature from the past, who stalked unhindered through the silent streets of the stricken city, I must find and slay him! If I could not slay him I must, somehow, bear him back to the tomb whence I had released him, and seal the mouth of his sarcophagus.

"You cannot do it," said a voice within me, "you released me from bondage, true; but no man that lives can bind me now and make me captive, ever—until the Aztecs have had their vengeance, and Huitzilopochtli has had his opportunity, denied him these four centuries, to take his place again before the stone of sacrifice and await the baring of the steaming hearts of his age-long enemies!"

I heard the words, within me as I have said; yet I myself had not spoken. As surely as though I had actually seen him, I knew that Guatemozin, who bore me no ill-will, watched me from the shadows.

I stiffened, and the short hair at the base of my skull rustled erect. I drew my weapon and pointed it at the wall of mist that hedged me in. Something told me that I did not aim in the right place.

"I am here, friend," it whispered, "shoot if you desire proof of the truth of what I say."

I could hear no words, as I say; but I *knew*.

I whirled toward the place whence the sound had *not* come, leveled the automatic and fired.

I FELL back on my hips with the force of the explosion, and the weapon vanished from my hand. The bullet had exploded at the weapon's muzzle, and the automatic had been broken into a thousand fragments! My whole right arm was numb with the force of the explosion, and my ears rang with the sound; yet, miraculously, I was but little hurt, aside from the shock.

I jumped to my feet and darted toward the wall of mist. I entered it, and knew that just ahead of me, always invisible, stalked the man in square *titmatli* and *pansche* of plumes.

Now and again I paused, and knew not why—save that the stalker must have paused, too, and I did not really care to overtake him. And when I moved on at last, knowing deep within me that the stalker moved ahead, lamentations, the lamentations of Latin Americans who screamed their frenzy over their dead, rose from the shuttered houses about me.

And I knew that the bronze death-angel of Tenochtitlán had paused in his stalking retreat to touch those shuttered homes with the plague of which he was the essence—had paused to touch them and, passing on, had left yet other mottled dead behind him.

But still I followed, nor knew when the stalker turned aside, putting me off the trail.

I CAME to myself out of my waking dream, stunned and bewildered, at the lip of the cleft in the soil beyond the outskirts of the city, which place I had not visited, save in nightmares, since I had looked back on that never-to-be-forgotten evening to discover Guatemozin in his Aztec regalia hovering near the tomb.

I was here, now, and intended to enter the tomb to see if I might not find there the solution to the problem that was driving me insane. But I found myself unable to enter, or even to stand at the lip of the cleft and peer into the depths, where the smoke mist through which I had passed in the city lay like a white pool far below me, masking the opening to the tomb.

But I could not enter, for out of the cleft, like a wall through which I could not force my way, swept that fetid odor, dank and cold as the breath from a tomb—which it was. And, still like a wall that moved, ponderous and invincible, the odor moved over me and through me, and was swept away on a wind I could not feel, like a voiceless hurricane—bearing straight and true toward the Capital City of Mexico!

Just for an instant, before I ran, the white mists at the bottom of the cleft parted, and through them I could see the familiar opening, with the hieroglyphs about it everywhere; I could peer deeply into the opening. There, standing in all its hideous solemnity on the block of stone which should have held the sarcophagus of Guatemozin, reposed the gross figure of Huizilopochtli, the Aztec god of war!

All about him were motionless shapes, hideous shapes, formless, yet significant. . . .

But the mists closed down again, the odor increased moment by moment in volume, and I could not be sure that I had really seen the horror I knew was there.

## CHAPTER VII

*Last of the Aztecs*

**S**TARVATION had set its terrible seal upon Tenochtitlán. This time, and without surprise at the swift transition which had occurred as I was retreating from the tomb of Guatemozin where swirled the mists, I watched it all from a convenient azotea, almost in the heart of the city. The streets of the ancient city were crowded with gaunt and hopeless Aztecs, with scarce a leader of renown and ability left among them. Alvarado and his butchers had cut down the flower of Aztec nobility at the crest of the *teocalli* of Ahuizotl; Montezuma had been a prisoner of the Great Captain, and had died in bondage, giving his three fair daughters into the hands of Cortés. I wondered what had become of the women, and if Cortés kept faith with the vanquished chieftain. . . .

Tenochtitlán was in a sad and sorry plight, and through all the sadness, warp and woof of it, throbbed the beating of the drum of calamity. The dead who had died foodless lay thickly in the streets, and those who were left to live, and face the returning Spaniards, were too weak to bury those who had fallen.

Yet the Aztecs still were undaunted, unafraid—though Cortés, with his Indian allies at his back, was already at the gates of Tenochtitlán. He had come to collect his pound of flesh for the horror which had been his during the never-to-be-forgotten night called *la noche triste*.

He had come back, as he had promised he would do, to "make of the city a heap of ruins."

And, save for Guatemozin, there was no prince left among them to lead the Aztecs.

Cortés obtained his memorable interview with the principal chiefs, who told him that Guatemozin would die, and all his Aztecs with him, be-

fore he would surrender to the white invaders.

**B**UT still Cortés waited, hoping that Guatemozin would change his mind, until the rumor came that Guatemozin and his nobles yet left alive were planning their escape in *piraguas* and canoes moored along the canals and waterways. It was then that Cortés took his position on the azotea upon which I stood, and made his dispositions for the final attack.

What a pitiful sight was all Tenochtitlán when Cortés began his mission of revenge! The streets were filled with the starving and the sick, huddled together without formation or design—men, women and children together, like sheep who huddle together for warmth, turning their backs to the blizzard—save that the Aztecs, defying their enemy to the very last, did not turn their backs.

The Spaniards approached within bowshot, and the Aztecs, with trembling fingers that scarce had strength enough to loose their arrows, sent an impotent shower of missiles toward the approaching foe. The arrows fell short, or had been shot so weakly that the armor of the Spaniards deflected them with ease.

The discharge of a single arquebus was the signal for the dreadful slaughter.

The sound of the arquebus had scarce died away when the wailing sound which hovered over Tenochtitlán was drowned in the peal after peal of heavy ordnance, the rattle of firearms, as the leaden hail of the Spaniards poured into the unresisting ranks of the disordered Aztecs. The Indian allies of the Spaniards hurried themselves ahead of their white leaders, leaping upon their traditional enemies with weapons bared, with no thought of giving quarter to anyone of the hated Aztec nation.

THAT slaughter was more than human flesh could bear; yet the Indian allies of the Spaniards had just begun. The Aztecs, who had lorded it over them for untold centuries, had been given into their hands, and they were finding sweet the gory fruits of vengeance. The Tlascalans were safe, for the Aztecs were too weak to offer more than passive resistance, and the Indian allies cut them down with ease.

Scarce an Aztec man in all that city's thousands begged for quarter—though near the last, when even the women who had faith in their warriors saw that there could be but one end to the slaughter, there were a few, and the women began to cry out to save their lives. But the swords and lances cut them down.

When a staunch *piragua* dashed out into the waters of the canal near the *azotea* upon which I stood, I caught a glimpse of a stately figure in its stern. For a moment the man's face was toward me—and I started in amazement, forgetting for a moment that I was but seeing a thing that had been history these four hundred years.

Guatemoxin! The same Guatemoxin, albeit a trifle younger, whom I had last seen in my own hotel room, garbed in the vestments of modern man. But here, striving to escape with his nobles in his *piragua*, he wore his square *tittmatli* of finest cotton, now stained with blood, and ragged because the swords of his enemy had touched him here and there, tearing his clothing; and his *panache* of greenish plumes floated out behind him as the oars of his rowers took him moment by moment nearer safety. Even here he scorned to hide behind disguise, just as his mad counterpart in my hotel room had scorned the vestments of the modern man—and his face held nothing but scorn and hatred for his white-skinned enemy as he looked behind him.

WHEN another *piragua* darted in pursuit I knew that Garcia Holquin was playing his part in history, and heading out to prevent the escape of Guatemoxin. But the warrior, armed with buckler and *macuahuitl*, faced his enemies, bringing his buckler to the fore, poising his gruesome weapon to beat off the attackers. It was not Guatemoxin who cried for quarter, but his nobles who were with him. They begged the Spaniards, when the latter leveled their murderous cross-bows, not to shoot, but to spare the life of Guatemoxin. And the words of the young warrior came across to where I stood on the *azotea*, clear as a bell, in a speech that, for me, was filled thrice over with deep significance:

"I am Guatemoxin. Lead me to Malinche. I am his prisoner; but let no harm come to my wife and my followers."

And so, with the capture of Guatemoxin, fell Tenochtitlán, as though the fighting Aztecs had lost heart at last, which they hadn't. Had the bronze-skinned prince commanded they would have fought on until the last of them had fallen. This I know, for whether or not it was a dream in which I saw them, I yet could read the hatred in the faces of those who surrendered at last—and I see it now as I write, and know that I speak truth. The Aztecs surrendered only because surrender seemed to be the desire of their only surviving chieftain of any rank—Guatemoxin.

HORROR gripped me as I gazed about me, for Tenochtitlán resembled a vast battlefield upon which the vanquished had fallen to the last man. Only the honored dead were left of all the Aztecs when the pitiful remnant, fulfilling the terms of the surrender, departed forever from Tenochtitlán. I saw them pass, staggering, weak with hunger, along the lanes which led through their dead, and their heads still were

proudly erect, and the last glances they cast behind them from their deep sunken eyes, were filled with hatred unquenchable for those who had despoiled them—a hatred that would outlast all eternity.

Guatemozin was the last I saw of all that sorry company, and just before the weary marchers passed from view, heading slowly toward the open country, the proud prince turned for a last look at the city of his nativity, and shook his fist at the Spaniards!

And a smoky mist came out of the west, blanketing the sun, to roll like a fog through the ravished streets of Tenochtitlán, hiding from view, with nature's mercy, the bodies of the dead. But all the mists of all the heavens could not blot the page of memory, nor dissolve the fetid odor which possessed Tenochtitlán. There had been a lapse of time before the odors came, I knew, but I marked it not. . . .

For I was thinking of many things, foremost of which was that the people of the City of Mexico were not to blame. No matter how fiercely burned the fires of vengeance in the breast of Guatemozin the Visitant, it was my duty, since I had released him from bondage, to save the City of Mexico from the horror which their ancestors had visited upon helpless Tenochtitlán.

For the Visitant, I knew, intended to demand a life for a life—and to take when his voiceless demands were refused.

THE smoky mists which hung over Tenochtitlán grew heavier, piled higher in the ravished streets, until they hid from view the whole of the Aztec Capital, muffled even the hoofs of the horses of the Conquistadores.

Suddenly, through the mists, out of the streets that now were invisible, came the sound of lamentations, and the lamentations were the lamenta-

tions of Latin American women who wept their heartbreaking sorrow over their beloved dead!

And out of the smoky mists, rising as if by magic from the ruins of Tenochtitlán, rose the Mexico City of to-day, coming into view like some ghostly city, building itself piece by piece, as though self-created, as a picture grows upon a screen!

Yet there was a single detail in which the two cities were the same!

For the dead lay thick in the streets of both of them—bronze-skinned dead in the streets of Tenochtitlán, every color between white and black in the City of Mexico!

Then Tenochtitlán was gone in its entirety, and only the City of Mexico remained, with its dead, and the wailing of people I must yet attempt to save filling all the world with terror and dismay.

And I?

I was being borne along *Calle del Puente de Alvarado* by a squad of Mexican soldiers, and when I questioned them they told me they had found me unconscious, my face mottled by plague splotches such as now were known throughout the Capital City!

They were not afraid to touch me, they explained, because they knew that escape from the plague was impossible in any case, and that sooner or later they must fall before it, no matter what they did.

"You are brave men," I babbled, "and I shall remember—and try to save you with the rest."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Tomb of Guatemozin*

EVEN now I tried to tell myself that there was a scientific explanation for the evil which had fallen over the Capital City of Mexico. I closed my eyes to the fact that my dreams had been always so vivid that they had seemed not dreams but

stark reality. And when reason told me that this was impossible I blamed my nightmares on the dread disease which had come out into God's sunshine with the opening of the tomb of Guatemozin. A weird and ghastly vengeance, this terrible plague of the brown spots on the bodies of the dead. . . .

One who had planned his vengeance for four hundred years could not have produced vengeance more ghastly!

The hotel manager came to me. I will not attempt to explain his appearance, save that he had aged a half a hundred years since I had last seen him.

"It is a miracle, friend," he said hoarsely. "You were stricken grievously, yet you live."

"It is an omen, Don Julio," I replied weakly, "an omen of good. I shall yet do something to halt the horror which rages rampant through all the country."

"But how, friend, how?" he whispered bitterly.

I did not at the moment attempt to answer him. I was thinking what I should do, and realizing that, innocent as I had been of any wrongdoing when I had opened the tomb of Guatemozin, it had still been my action which had brought catastrophe to Mexico City. Yet how could I stay Guatemozin now, whose power for horrible revenge seemed to increase as the hours sped?

Then it came to me, though not as clearly as it came later. It was just an idea at first, an idea that caused me to shudder as though my flesh had been touched by the icy hand of a corpse.

"Don Julio," I said at length, "I think there is yet a way."

**I** PAUSED for a moment, studying Don Julio. I had no doubt of his courage. He was afraid, true; but he was able to carry on and override his fear.

"Don Julio," I continued, "will you go with me to the tomb of Guatemozin and help me?"

"To the tomb of Guatemozin?"

"Yes."

"But why to the tomb of Guatemozin?"

"Because the horror which hovers over Mexico comes out of that tomb! And I am the guilty one who broke the seals!"

"B-but," stammered Don Julio, "I am not quite sure that I understand."

He didn't, but when I mentioned the word tomb his whole face tightened, until the flesh was drawn back from his teeth, so that he seemed to snarl at me. Fear such as I believed no one capable of harboring had taken possession of him—and he seemed to shrink, little and wizened, as though another decade or two had fallen upon his already sagging shoulders. Yet the will of the indomitable little man showed through his natural fear, and his answer came softly, as though from an incredible distance.

"For Mexico," he said, "I will try whatever you believe proper. Great God, friend, what can I do? My father is dead, and he was an old man, old and feeble, and my mother already has followed him. I have not gone to the rooms of my wife for two days, because I know, from the silence which comes through the closed door of our rooms, that there is nothing now that I can do. I haven't the courage to gaze upon my loved ones, if they are, as I know they are, marked like others I have seen. This place in which you and I are now the only living inmates has suffered with the rest, and the silence of death has made of this place a darksome tomb. Yes, friend, lead on, and I will follow."

**T**HEN listen, Don Julio," I said "I am not strong; I am still very sick, so sick that I should die if I did not know that I had work to

do. I am scarce able to put one foot before the other, else I would never ask you to share the abysmal horror which I know will face us in the tomb of Guatemoxin. I am asking you only because you love Mexico, and because I haven't the power to carry through alone."

And with these words of my dependence on him the great little man seemed to shift some of those decades from his shoulders, so that he looked at me clear-eyed as he made reply.

"I am waiting, friend. When?"

"To-night, Don Julio."

"May the guardianship of Mother Mary be over us!" said Don Julio. "I shall take with me my mother's crucifix, some holy water which I carry in a little vial about my neck—"

"Stop, Julio! We are not dealing with ghosts and familiars, but with a man who is a living fiend. He is but one man, after all, and has only succeeded in slaying so many because of the plague which is in his touch. We merely go to his tomb to await his coming, when we will set upon him, both of us, and slay him."

We started from the hotel, our mouths covered with cloths because of the pestilential odors which filled all the city streets, and even as we walked along through the dusk Don Julio made protest.

"One man, did you say, friend? One man? Could one man have stolen the statue of the Aztec god of war from the *Museo Nacional* and borne it away—unless he were able to evoke the aid of discredited and terrible gods? No, friend, no one man could have borne away the image of the hideous god whose followers have vanished from the earth."

**A** SHIVER of fear—or was it my terrible sickness?—caused me to stagger as we walked along through the gathering darkness,

through that smoky mist which caressed us now like icy fingers, seeking us everywhere through our clothing. For I was remembering again.

That white mist at the bottom of the fateful excavation; how it had spread away to right and left to give me a glimpse of the hideous figure of Huitzilopochtli upon the pedestal which should have held the sarcophagus of Guatemoxin!

But I knew the vision had been a dream. Else how could I have seen that figure on the pedestal, when a long winding stairway led down to it from the excavation, so that it was impossible to see the interior of the tomb from above? But then, it had been a dream—or had it?—in which I had traversed that circular stairway!

No matter, we would soon know. Though it came forcibly home to me that I had never penetrated the tomb save in my nightmares, and then but once.

Darkness had completely fallen when we stood at the lip of the cleft and looked down, into other darkness impenetrable, with just a suggestion of white, like drifting smoke, far below us.

"Come, Don Julio," I said, "for hesitation may steal our courage."

**I** SLID down the side of the cleft, and was relieved when a clatter of rubble went with me. This, at least, was not a dream, and I was a corporeal being. I looked back at Don Julio where he stood, and saw him hesitate, to make the sign of the cross ere he sprang down beside me, slipping to his knees with the force of the fall. He jumped up on the instant, to gaze wildly about him at our mysterious surroundings; he looked upward whence he had just leaped, where the black motionless clouds which had hovered over all the country since the release of Guatemoxin still hid the moon and the stars.



I seized his hand, and, forcing him to stoop low, dove into that opening.

And our feet, whose tread sounded hollowly in the confined space, encountered the first steps of a stairway!

It was circular, too, as it had been in my dreams. The breathing of Don Julio sounded harshly in my ears—or it may have been the thunderous beating of my own heart. But we continued our downward journey into, it seemed, the very howels of the earth.

We stopped at intervals to listen, and it was during one of these breathless, nerve-destroying halts that the idea for which I had been groping struck me with the force of a blow, and proved to me that instinct had served me faithfully in bringing me to this place.

"Don Julio," I whispered, "where does the mad Guatemozin go when he is resting from his gruesome labors? What place more fitting than the sarcophagus which held him captive for four centuries?"

Don Julio merely shook his head and did not reply.

It seemed as though countless hours had passed when we came finally to the bottom of that interminable stairway. God! If our plans were to go awry! If we were to be trapped here! We might shout our lungs away and none in the world outside would hear us.

But the world outside was suffering, because of this same tomb I had opened!

That knowledge, and knowledge of the vast courage which had driven Don Julio to follow me here, strengthened me. I wondered how I should have felt had I come to this dreadful place without him.

WITH Don Julio holding to my wrist with a grip of steel I groped my way to the pedestal I knew rested in the center of this aged tomb. I found it, and my hand

played over it—and I realized on the instant that there had been truth somewhere in the chaos of my terrible nightmares! For my fingers did not touch the sarcophagus I knew should have been there—and cold metal continued on and upward from the top of the pedestal. . . .

I knew that my fingers played over the outlines of the monstrous statue of Huitzilopochtli which had been stolen from the *Museo Nacional*!

Fear did not leave me entirely, but I did regain control of myself somewhat within a second or two after my dread discovery. Still with Don Julio clinging to me like a trusting child I began to circle the pedestal, and I stumbled over something solid which rang with the impact of my heavy shoes. I bent to examine this obstruction. . . .

I knew that here, below the invisible eyes of the Aztec god of war, reposed the sarcophagus of Guatemozin, with its heavy cover beside it, as though the occupant had just departed and expected to return!

I don't know why I did it, for I must have known what I would find. I groped again over the status of the hideous god of the Aztecs, seeking the gruesome bowl which, in olden times, had held the steaming hearts of victims of the sacrifice. How many it had held in its time no human being can even guess. When Huizotl had finished the great *teocalli* there had been a hecatomb of victims.

My hand, almost against my will, played over the gruesome bowl, and my feeling as I did so was very much indeed like that of a man who dives into inky black water, seeking by sense of touch for someone who has drowned.

FINALLY my hand came to rest. . . .

But horror could do no more. I will only say that I knew where the hearts of those first six who had died

had gone, and wondered why the physicians who had performed the autopsies hadn't given their public all the truth!

"Help me, Julio," I whispered.

As nearly as I could judge to be the proper location, and using all our combined strength, which was little enough because of our fear and sickness, we managed to move the sarcophagus of Guatemoxin a few feet from the pedestal of the war-god. Then another idea struck me: my pistol had not slain the madman. How could I be sure that he might not escape even as we toppled the statue from its pedestal upon him? We moved the sarcophagus back again, against the pedestal, and I compared the height of the pedestal with the top of the sarcophagus, and prayed that this new mad plan might have some hope of success. One thing was in its favor. Guatemoxin, if indeed he ever returned to his tomb, would not discover that his casket had been moved.

Then, after I had explained to Don Julio what I intended, we drew back against the wall opposite the stairway to wait.

Where is the man whose imaginations will not drive him to the verge of insanity if he is compelled to wait for hours in the deep silence of a tomb? Not even a scurrying rat to vary the monotony—nothing but silence, the odor of decay, of antiquity, and dread of what the hours to come may bring.

A GREAT sigh filled all the darkness. I started and all but screamed, and felt the hair stand stiffly all along my skull; but it was only the explosive escaping of my bated breath. My cheeks seemed bathed in perspiration, and I mopped them with my hand and shivered. For to touch my face recalled to me those brownish splotches on my cheeks, hidden by the tomb's eternal night time.

"Listen," whispered Don Julio, and his hand at my wrist tightened like the lips of a vise.

"The wind, Don Julio," I made reply, and the echoes emphasized my words.

But we forgot the wind then, and our bodies became as taut as bow-strings.

"You hear?" said Julio. "'Tis the clatter of falling rubble in the excavation!"

"We must hide then," I said, "for if he finds us here, we fall—and there will be two other hearts before the war-god's pedestal."

We glided back to another opening which I remembered from my nightmare—another opening which gave upon another stairway leading farther downward. We stepped through, and flung ourselves flat upon the stairs.

"Lie low, Julio," I whispered, "for he will hear the beating of your heart."

But it was my own heart which pounded thunderously a mad tattoo against my straining ribs.

But Don Julio did not question, and just the knowledge that he was below me, and behind, gave me a little more courage.

Then I halted even my breathing, until my lungs were likely to burst, striving to time my throbbing pulses, to synchronize them with the steady sound of gentle footfalls on the winding stairs!

A FLICKERING glow of light was in the tomb, and in its eery waving I could soon discern the gruesome outlines of the war-god on his aged pedestal. I inched forward and craned my neck to peer upward, to discover that the tomb of Guatemoxin was square and that its roof was invisible in the shadows far above. And then, down the stairway which wound about the sides of the terrible place, moving with the state-ly grace of one who has the power of

all the world within his hand, came a weird figure, waird because of the flickering light from a flaming, sputtering torch and the shadow-pictures on the aged walls. The figure was dressed in that costume which I shall never, in this world or the next, be able to arase from the tablets of memory: square *titmatli* of white cotton, and now bedraggled *panache* of plumes! And I knew that the sound of gentle footfalls was caused by the shuffling of golden-soled sandals.

Guatemozin!

He did not hold his robe to hide his face, and I breathed a sigh of relief. This much, at least, of the tale Don Julio had once told me, was proved untrue: the head of Guatemozin was not a grinning skull, nor were his hands the hands of a skeleton!

But as he moved moment by moment nearer I knew that we must move farther down our stairway, lest the light of his torch disclose us. Would he come to this opening and peer in befora going to his rest? A terrible chance, which would compel us to leap upon this man whom I knew could slay us both with his hands. It must not happen! If I but had my automatic. Than I remembered what had happened to it, and Don Julio answered my unspoken thought by pressing a slender dagger into my hand. I gripped it, and just to touch it gave me fresh courage. I held my place until I could see the face of Guatemozin. There was nothing hideous in it. It was the face of one who is very tired from his labors, and I wonderad if, after all, his revenge had been as sweet as he desired.

**T**HEN we moved back and held our breath once more. When the light from the torch became motionless I knew that Guatemozin had halted to peer into the terrible face of the god whom he served, and the

time of his silent scrutiny, or silent worship seemad endless.

But the light vanished, and darkness more weighty than before took possession of the tomb; and then there was silence, after a langth of time it would have taken a man to compose himself to sleep.

But still we waitad—many hours it seemed—listening to his breathing which the echoes brought softly to us.

I reached back at last and touched the shoulders of Don Julio, and found him trembling like a leaf. Like two ghouls we entered that tomb for the last time—heaven willing!—moving like cats on our bare feet, for we had taken time to remove our shoes. We had laid our plans, and I had whispered last directions to Julio. We separated and moved in opposite directions around the great statue. I placed my hands upon the cover of the sarcophagus, and when I felt it quiver slightly I knew that Julio was ready.

"Now!" I shouted.

"Now! Now! Now!" shriekad the echoes. But the wordless shouting of the echoes changad to a reverberating clanging of metal as we lifted the ponderous lid of the sarcophagus and placed it atop the primitive casket it had sealed for so many centuries. Then we stood upon it, nor could we hear the screams of Guatemozin through the thickness of the cover. It trembled under our feet, however, and we knew that the *thing* below us fought with all his power to brack free and gain his freedom—but he failed!

And, straining until our muscles must have stood out like cords, we moved the statue, inch by inch, from the pedestal, until all its weight held prisoner the man we had known as Guatemozin!

**F**ORGETFULNESS will never be mine, for I feel that I have oceans of blood upon my soul. I fled

from Mexico in the middle of the night, because friends and relatives of those who had died were seeking me to take my life, and Don Julio aided my escape. He promised me when he left me that the excavation I had made would be closed tightly again.

And so I have hidden myself, here in this silent room. It is silent because I cannot bear the sound of voices, which remind me of the lamentations of those who waited over their dead. But still here is no escape, for the silent room reminds me

always of the tomb of Guatemozin.

And there are other things, two of them. The marks on my face—for which reason I refuse to have a mirror in my room. But the other thing is good for my soul, since it is a symbol that it is not good for the mind of man to hold forbidden knowledge.

The other thing?

It rests on my mantelpiece, before me always, as a reminder of a great dread.

A pair of sandals with golden soles!

## Science and Old Magic

THE practices of primitive religions were usually so closely intertwined with the trickeries of its medicine-men or magician-priests that it is to-day a source of wonder how these men could achieve their "magic" so effectively with the primitive science at their disposal. We know that the results they got certainly required a good knowledge of mechanics, even if the mechanism they employed in their religious impostures were in their day carefully concealed from the worshippers and are now, for the most part, no longer in existence.

When, in some of the infamous mysteries of ancient Rome, the unfortunate victims were thought to have been carried off by the gods, they were probably hurried away by the power of machinery; when Apollonius, conducted by Indian egipt to the temple of their god, felt the earth rising and falling beneath his feet like the agitated sea, he was no doubt standing on a moving floor capable of imitating the heavings of the waves. The rapid descent of those who consulted the oracle in the cave of Trophonius, the moving tripods which Apollonius saw in the Indian temples, the walking statues at Antium and in the temple of Hierapolis, the wooden pigeon of Archytas—these are samples of the mechanical resources of the ancient magic as practised by the priesthood.

Among the most common and successful impostures of the ancients were those of an optical nature, practised by mirrors made of polished steel and silver—made to give multiplied and inverted images of objects, and therefore plane, many-sided and concave.

Among these, they probably found the concave mirror most useful, and without a doubt it was most used in this trick of

making the heathen gods appear in the temples. In the imperfect accounts which have come down of these apparitions, these can be traced all the elements of an optical illusion. In the ancient temple of Hercules at Tyre, Pliny mentions that there was a seat made of a consecrated stone, "from which the gods easily arose;" the temple of Enguinum in Sicily was celebrated as the place where the goddesses exhibited themselves to mortals. Jamblichus informs us that the ancient magicians caused the gods to appear among the vapors released by fire; and when the conjuror Maximus terrified his audience by making the statue of Hecate laugh, while in the middle of the smoke burning incense, he was obviously dealing with the image of a living object dressed in the costume of the sorceress and projected on the smoke by means of hidden concave mirrors.

A more modern example of this same sort of illusion is that of the Emperor Basil, who, inconsolable at the loss of his son, had recourse to the pontiff Theodore Santabaren, who was celebrated for his power of working miracles. The ecclesiastical conjuror exhibited to him the image of his beloved son magnificently dressed and mounted upon a superb charger; the youth rushed towards his father, threw himself into his arms and disappeared. This deception could not have been made by one who imitated the real prince, for there is no good explanation of how the boy could have been instantaneously disentangled from his father's embrace. What the Emperor no doubt saw was the aerial image of a picture of his son on horseback—an image thrown by a strong concealed light into one of two hidden concave mirrors and thence projected on a curtain of vapor.



*We had been deliberately trapped!*

## After Sunset

By Philip Hazleton

**T**HE great rooms of the Gillett mansion on Fifth Avenue were crowded with wedding guests. Flowers banked

the walls, overflowing into the hall and pouring in a fragrant cascade down the stairs. From the

concealed organ drifted the first rumbling strains of the wedding march into the night outside.

I moved uneasily; a strange sensation of impending evil swept over me. I felt that eyes were upon me—intense eyes in which

Always the sunset stirs to new life  
the body of Gragoak—always her  
blood leaps quivering to the thrill  
of her unhallowed chase.

dwelt a growing suspicion. A tiny, icy-cold shudder touched my spine. And yet what was there about me that anyone could suspect? My gown was perfection; my hair was arranged as only the deft fingers of Marie could arrange it, and since I had entered the room a hundred eyes had paid tribute to my beauty. Yet the feeling of danger, vague as a smoke-wreath, persisted. I could stand it no longer. I turned. Jaffee, the old Gillett butler, was standing in the doorway, his eyes fastened upon my face as if he would bore through it and read my very soul.

I almost laughed in my relief. Old Jaffee, courteous, deferential, a perfect servant—what harm could old Jaffee do to me? And yet the clinging sensation of danger persisted even after Jaffee had lowered his strangely intent eyes and turned away.

"My dear," said an old lady, one of the wedding guests, laying a thin, heavily jeweled hand on my arm, "did you ever see a handsomer man?"

My eyes swerved to the bower of bridal roses and lilies where stood the waiting groom. My breath caught in my throat. My heart contracted. Who was this man standing there, so tall, so handsome, so commanding, waiting for little Anita Gillett to come in her bridal veil and marry him? I had never seen him before, yet I felt I had known him for all eternity. What was there about him that called to me, compelled me?

It had been four hundred years since anyone had called to me as this strange man was calling—four hundred years since I had lain, throbbing with warm human life, in the arms of Prince Feodore Stalitz. But Prince Feodore was dead. Though not dead as I was dead—I, who roved the world from sunset to sunrise, leaving in my wake a trail of blood and horror.

THE wedding march rose and swelled. Down the stairs, through the waiting hush, came Anita Gillett, lovely and sweet and smiling. But I didn't even turn to glance at her. My eyes, my heart, every atom of my being were absorbed in the man waiting underneath the roses. And suddenly he smiled—smiled at his oncoming bride. A shiver went through me, a hot thrill of jealousy! Suddenly I hated Anita for arousing that smile. A new, burning determination shot through me. That man must belong to me!

The marriage ceremony was ended. Smiling and happy the little bride came tripping down the long room on the arm of her tall and brilliantly handsome new husband. Nearer he was coming, and nearer. My blood pounded in my temples. My throat grew hot. That man belonged to me. Strangers though we were, there was a bond between us. I could feel it like a flow of electric current. He must not belong to Anita.

Suddenly he raised his eyes straight to mine. For a long moment our gaze met and clung. Over me swept the sure sense of my power: I would hypnotize him—bind him with my spell. It seemed an eternity that I gazed at him, compelling his mind to my will. His eyes were acquiescent, eager. A hot thrill of triumph swept over me.

The couple passed me, and I saw Anita's profile as she smiled adoringly up into Merle Crossley's face. I set my teeth against the swift surge of jealousy that shook me. Slowly, carefully, I began laying my plans. . . .

The wedding reception dragged to a close. I could hardly wait for the moment when little Anita Gillett would excuse herself and run upstairs to exchange her bridal gown for her traveling frock. If

seemed to me hours that she stood there, rosy and sweet and smiling, receiving the congratulations of her guests. But at last it was over. At last she turned to her new husband with that same smile, so filled with love. I watched the little scene—but this time without jealousy. This time I gloated over them. Poor fools, feeling so safe in their happiness! Never again would Anita's young eyes rest on Merle's handsome face! Never again would her ears hear his whispered words of love! In an hour she would be a corpse, and he—be would belong to me!

Trembling with eagerness I followed the young bride up the stairs and along the broad hallway to her room. And no one spoke to me, no one stopped me, for no one could see me. I had become a gray and almost invisible shadow!

ANITA entered her room, and close at her heels I followed. She sat down at her dressing table, smiling at her reflection as she removed the orange blossoms and lace of her bridal veil. I shuddered. How I loathed and detested the sight of a mirror! I tore my eyes from the revolting sight and gazed at little Anita herself, her hair ruffled around her happily flushed face, her cheeks scarlet with excitement, her lips red with good young blood. Young blood—how I loved it! How delicious it was—how sweet, how strong! I could feel the saliva start in my mouth.

From the misty figure that was I, I materialized my two eyes, hungry, gleaming, and threw my power toward the slim and lovely figure of the little bride. She felt my power, and turned. Her eyes grew wide with terror; her throat contracted in a scream: but no scream came. My eye went through her like a freezing flame. She grew livid; her eyes glazed with the

deep unconsciousness of hypnotism.

In a flash I became myself, beautiful, alluring, seductive, only my devouring eyes and my bungrily dripping mouth betraying me. But what difference did that make? There was now no one there to see.

The moment had come for which I existed—that moment which was the horrible climax of all my efforts, all my schemings. The greed for blood rose in my throat, throbbed in my lips. I was faint with longing, trembling with eagerness. I swooped down on the limp form of the unconscious girl. My sharp teeth pierced the tender flesh of her throat. Ah-h!—the good young blood gushed out—poured down my parched throat, salty and thick and warm. Young blood—bappy blood—I sucked it in in great splendid gulps; sucked into my dead body the glorious life-blood of the little bride!

I wiped my mouth on the lace bridal veil. I was rejuvenated. My beauty was made warmer, more glowing, by my feast. I thrilled with new life and vigor—the life and vigor of little Anita Gillett. Without a glance at my victim I turned and left the room. There was now but one thought in my mind—Merle Crossley. Would the brief spell I had cast on him be sufficient? Had he, even now, forgotten his bride? Was mine the only face in his mind? As I went downstairs a chuckle of triumph rose to my smiling lips. For well I knew the sinister strength of my power.

DANCING was going on. Across the beads of the dancers I could see his splendidly handsome face, his fine broad shoulders. My eyes rested on him. He turned, and my eyes, grew intent, magnetic: whatever his will they would draw him to me: I stood still and waited

while he threaded his way through the crowd and came to me. Without a word I gave myself into his arms and we danced. At his touch I felt again that strange compelling power that made me want to throw myself at his feet in a passion of longing and desire. I closed my eyes and allowed this powerful urge to break over me. More and more this man made me think of Feodore. His arms were the arms of Feodore. His eyes glowed warm with the same delicious promises that had thrilled me four hundred years before, and his touch and the tones of his voice were the touch and tones of Feodore. But of course Feodore was dead.

I was still dancing with Merle when the servants began circulating quietly among the guests. I watched them with a little half smile behind my eyes. Long before their words reached my ears I knew what message they brought. Anita had been found. She was dying. Some mysterious malady had stricken her. How I chuckled, deep in my soul!

But suddenly my chuckle died. I shivered with that premonition of danger I had felt once before that evening. Swiftly I raised my eyes. From his post near the doorway Jaffee was staring at me, and in his gaze I read suspicion and a dreadful fear.

But instantly I had forgotten Jaffee, forgotten my foreboding of danger, forgotten everything in the swift, warm glory of Merle's smile. Ah!—my triumph was complete; my spell had conquered utterly! This handsome man at my side listened to the news of his bride's imminent death—and smiled at me! He leaned toward me.

"Possibly," he whispered, "it is my duty to stay here—but all my soul belongs to you."

dance," I said, raising my eyes to  
"We will go somewhere and

his, and my heart leaped with triumph at the light of love I saw there.

So, without another word, we turned and left that house where, in an upper room, little Anita lay, a dying bride.

IT was five o'clock in the morning before he left me in the foyer of the hotel where I had my suite. For five hours I had swayed to lilting music in his arms, I had thrilled to his whispered words of adoration, I had watched the light of love deepening in his eyes.

But I could not linger. Already the first chill of approaching dawn was in the air. I must hurry, hurry; the age-old instinct of my kind urged me to speed. Suppose I delayed too long; suppose the first rays of the rising sun found me walking the earth! A shudder of terror swept over me. My fear of death when I was a human being was as nothing compared to my frozen horror at the bare thought of extinction now. I must hurry, hurry. Not even for the delight of Merle Crossley's love would I delay an instant!

"When may I see you again?" he implored. "I must leave you now, but when next may I see you? You are so beautiful!"

"I don't know," I muttered. "Please don't delay me—" My mind was becoming confused, blurred. I couldn't think. All I knew was that I must get to my room; I must reach safety. Suppose the dawn found me! I clamped my teeth shut to keep them from chattering with fear.

"I will phone you," he said quickly; "and perhaps we will have another evening of dancing?"

I nodded hastily, hardly aware of what he was saying. Dimly I was glad that he had mentioned the evening. If he had suggested calling on me during the day I might



have stopped an instant too long to explain. I had no time for explanations. The dawn was coming—the dawn, the dawn!

"Good night!" I gasped the words breathlessly, and turned and ran.

NEVER did an elevator rise so slowly. Oh, why had I been such a fool as to take a suite on the twentieth floor? Why hadn't I foreseen that dawn might catch me in the elevator? One finger of the sun's ray's touching the horizon, one gleam of true daylight and I would be no more! Vera Gregosk—the beautiful Vera Gregosk—would be a heap of mouldy bones and rotting flesh!

The elevator door clanged open. I ran down the corridor and hurst into my rooms. Ah—safe at last! Marie, my faithful Marie, had prepared everything for me. Marie, too, was a creature of the night, of death, of putrid evil. Marie knew well what the coming of dawn meant to us both. There were the boxes of earth, prepared and waiting; there was safety—and death!

In my eagerness and rising terror I ripped the clothes from my body. Every instant was precious. Even now, even as close to security as I was, I might be a second too late. My clothes lay in torn heaps on the floor. Frantically I wrapped a winding-sheet around my body. I leaped into my coffin; the heavy, musty odor of earth rose to my quivering nostrils, and with a gasp of relief I pulled the coffin lid over me, shutting out the terrible daylight. I was safe! My heavy eyelids dropped halfway over my eyes, my supple limbs were warm with Anita's blood. The chill of dawn could never harm me now.

A slow languor crept over me—Death. But not for long! Half unconscious as I was, a gurgle of laughter rose to my lips. For a few hours Death might hold me in his

cold arms—and then I would rise stronger, more powerful, more gloriously evil than before! . . .

WHEN I came to it was dusk, the sweet safe dusk that meant the sun had gone down. Marie was already up and about.

"Anita Gillett is dead," said Marie, and I could see her eyes gleaming red in the shadowy room.

I smiled and stretched my beautiful body luxuriously. I had known she would die, but it was good to hear it. My heart thrilled as I thought of Merle Crossley.

"The funeral is this evening," went on Marie. "They believe there is something strange about the death and they are not waiting the customary three days."

I joined her in her ghouliah laughter. Our shadowed and dusk-filled room rang with our merriment. Then, suddenly, a thought struck me. Was there danger to me in the fact that they considered Anita's a strange death? What made them think it was strange? How much did they know, this family of Anita's with their attendant doctors and churchmen? Were there people here in New York wise enough to deal with such as I? The thought sent a chill through me. Was it actually possible that danger to me lurked in the big Gillett mansion? I remembered my sinister foreboding of the evening before.

I bathed and dressed slowly. If there were danger I must know it. One of my most compelling instincts was a burning curiosity. More than once it had almost been the means of trapping me, and now it drew me to Anita Gillett's funeral as a magnet would draw a steel shaving. I must know why they would not wait the customary time for the funeral. I must know why they thought the death "strange." Even though I shook with fear, even though my instincts

told me that with every step I was going into danger, my unquenchable curiosity spurred me on.

The cars were parked for two blocks on either side of the big Gillett house on Fifth Avenue. The same brilliant gathering that had assembled the night before for the Gillett-Crossley wedding had returned the day following for little Anita's funeral. Slowly I walked up the wide stone steps and through the heavy door. Small knots of people were talking in the hallway. The funeral had not begun. Was it my scent of danger, or did they actually stop talking and turn to stare at me as I entered? I trembled with terror. But there was no turning back now. If I left the house my departure would be noted. If I disguised myself in any of the hundred shapes within my power they would know instantly that I was not human. And possibly I was wrong; possibly there were other reasons for having the funeral at once: I tried to cheer myself with all the arguments I could think of as I walked slowly down the hall and into the long room where the services were to be held. It was the same room where, just twenty-four hours before, Anita and Merle had been married. I suppressed a chuckle. Even my rising terror could not take away from me my sense of triumph. Come what may, Anita was dead. And Merle was mine!

**B**UT throughout the brief funeral service my instincts bristled to the sense of danger in the air. Something was wrong. Some power was there before which my own power trembled. Even the sight of Merle, his eyes burning with love and adoration, could not quench my cold shivers of fear.

My one thought was to get away. But there was nothing I could do that would not draw further atten-

tion to myself and throw me into greater danger. Even after the service was ended I was forced to stay, to mingle with the guests who were slowly filing past the coffin to look their last on what they called "the tragic young bride." Ha-ha!—if they only knew how tragic! If they only knew that she was not dead, their little Anita! If they only knew that she would rise from her grave—even as I—to roam the world in search of blood! But even in my moment of triumph my spine trickled with fear. Suppose they did know! Suppose with all my care they had guessed!

Merle Crossley stood at my side as I looked in the coffin. There she lay, the little dead bride, robed in her wedding gown, her wedding flowers heaped around her. And I—I, with my dark and splendid powers of evil—had put her there! I thrilled with pride and for an instant even my hideous feeling of danger was lost. Then I turned to Merle.

"Take me to dance," I whispered. "I want gayety, music, and the love in your eyes!"

Instantly he turned from the waxen face in the coffin; without a backward look we left the house. And not till the heavy door had closed behind us, not till we were out in the thick, clinging shadows of the night, did I lose that terrible sense of impending danger. Someone in that house was a menace to me. Someone—but who?

But still my curiosity spurred me on. Anita was dead; Anita was buried; but I must yet be sure my curse held. I must be sure I had done my diabolical job well; that little Anita would never be able to rest in her grave like a pure soul but would become a rotten bat-winged creature of the night—even as I—roaming the world, ravenous for human blood.

THAT was my one thought as I opened my eyes the following evening just as the sun fell like a red ball below the horizon. I must rush to the cemetery and set my watch above the newly sodded grave of Anita Gillett. I was so eager, and my curiosity burned so high, that at first I was tempted to take the form of a night wind and blow myself directly to the grave. But then that same sense of impending danger swept over me. Suppose someone did suspect me? Suppose I were watched? Wouldn't it be safer, wiser, to ride to the cemetery as an earth-bound human being would ride? So, holding my eagerness in leash, I dressed quietly in a dark suit and had a taxi called for me.

But I dared not tell the man to drive to the cemetery. No matter what inconvenience it meant for me, I must be cautious. I could imagine how the poor fool would stare at the instructions of a beautiful woman to be taken alone to a cemetery after dark. So I gave him the address of an apartment house on the street that ran along one side of the graveyard. Then I settled myself for the long drive with a feeling of satisfaction. Surely I could tell this way if I were being followed, if I were being watched.

It was a long drive and, to me, who had the power of traveling like the wind, an intolerably slow one. But at last the tall, dim monuments came into view; the black shadows of the hanked trees; the ghostly gleaming marble of the mausoleums. I paid the driver and watched him drive away. No one had followed me. I was alone. Almost running in my eagerness, I crossed the street and slipped between the great gates of the cemetery.

Every vestige of afterglow had faded from the sky. It was pitch dark. A storm was rising and dark clouds scudded before a cold wet

wind. But I didn't feel the cold, and my eyes must have gleamed in the dark like a wild beast's. For a long moment I crouched in the black shadow of a cluster of cedar trees. Was I safe? Was I actually alone? Or was someone, some power, waiting to trap me? I could not rid myself of that horrible sensation of living, walking danger.

But though I watched and waited there was no least sign of life. The ghostly monuments gleamed palely through the darkness; the wide-reaching, hungry arms of the trees whipped and tossed in the rising wind; the heavy, decaying odor of the graves rose to my twitching nostrils. I was alone in that City of the Dead. I was safe. Spreading my arms I whispered the mystical incantations I knew so well. My body shrank and grew furry; my arms became wings, great webbed wings, black and menacing. Only my eyes remained the same—glittering in the dark, human and evil. With a prolonged hat-squeak of satisfaction I rose from the ground and flew across the cemetery, straight for the grave of Anita Gillett.

And now that my safety was assured only one thought fretted my mind. Was I in time? Was the slim body of Anita still in its coffin, or had it already sped away on its inevitable quest?

I FOUND the grave. The heavy odor of the fresh flowers, those bridal-funeral flowers, sickened me, but through them I could smell the musty, putrefying stench of the grave—other bodies, human bodies, that lay, decayed and rotten, in neighboring graves.

I hung my hat-body on a branch of a tree over the head of the grave and waited.

Suddenly my eye was caught by a dark shadow of movement. Who was there in the cemetery with me?

My glowing eyes burned through the darkness—and stared into other glowing eyes! On a branch of a neighboring tree hung another bat! In the black shadow I could see the spread of its webbed wings, the furry shape of its mouse-like body. Who was it? Was my vigil shared? Was there another such as I who watched at the newly sodded grave? Or was this creature just an ordinary bat? A tremor of fury swept over me. Anita was my victim! By what right did another come here to watch?

Then, swiftly, I forgot everything else but the grave below me. Anita was coming! My triumph was complete!

Above the grave there was gathering a white mist, a dimly phosphorescent glow that beat and pulsed with the promise of life. It rose and sank, and rose and sank again, as if loth to leave its earth-bound coffin. I knew that feeling. I knew well with what reluctance the virgin soul of Anita Gillett was giving itself over to the vile and hideous powers of evil that I had called down upon it. But the powers of evil would win. I watched and laughed to think how futile were the efforts of that soul to escape. There was no escape! Anita was condemned to years, to eons of living death! Daily she would be a corpse—and nightly roam the world in search of human blood. She could never be released, never be free of her unholy bondage, unless— But even to contemplate the agony that was the cursed soul's only gateway to freedom was torture.

Now the mist above the grave was gathering, was assuming shape, was becoming Anita—a pale, wan, delicate shadow of the girl herself. I chuckled. Did she know why she was pale and weak? Did her instinct tell her what she needed? Did she know for what she hungered?

She began drifting toward the gates of the cemetery. Half walking, half floating she went, and I dropped from the tree and flew slowly after her. But as I flew I was conscious that again I was not alone. That other bat had left its tree and was trailing Anita too.

AT the stone gates of the cemetery she paused. I attached myself to the branch of a tree and watched. Up the opposite side of the street, half a block away, came a small boy whistling. It was late for small boys to be about, but that was Anita's good luck. On he came. I watched him and my own mouth watered. But my veins were still rich with Anita's blood: I could wait.

The small boy was near now. What would Anita do? Did she know for what her pale and wasted body starved? From the shelter of my tree I watched. She was staring at the boy, her eyes growing strong and luminous in the darkness. She was moving toward him. Suddenly he saw her—saw her floating, phosphorescent, toward him—saw her huge, blazing eyes, glittering with their evil, malignant power. He tried to scream. He tried to run. Terror made his face livid in the darkness; his hair stood up like a sandy brush. She swooped toward him, her incandescent eyes robbing him of all power, all consciousness. She raised his limp body in her arms, and with a chortle of ghoul-like glee bent her head to the tender flesh of his neck.

Well I knew the hot thrill that was sweeping over her. Even after four hundred years I could taste, in memory, my first drink of human blood. Warm and salty, rich and satisfying! Pouring into the wasted veins of the dead Thing new vigor, new strength, new power! I leaned from my branch, watching her hungrily. The sight was giving

me an appetite. In my own veins I felt the longing for nourishment. But that would have to wait. I had promised Merle to be ready for him at ten and the hour was approaching.

Anita tossed away the boy's limp body. I laughed to see the glorious change in her. She was strong now, and walked the earth with firm tread and lithe, free grace. My work was done. The pure virgin soul of her was damned, thrice damned. A gurgle of glee rose to my lips but I choked it back.

That other bat was watching me with gleaming eyes.

Again a tremor of fury shook me. What right had another to come here and watch Anita? Fool—I would outwit him! I would not allow myself to be watched and spied upon! Back into the black shadow of the tree I shrank. I would become a wind! I would rise high and mingle with the night wind screeching among the tree-tops; I would blow myself back to my hotel. No one, not even a glowing-eyed bat, should follow me!

**T**WO hours later Merle, tall, handsome and distinguished, came to meet me at my hotel. Stronger than ever before I felt the urge of his personality. What was his power? What was there about him that compelled me, that fascinated me so? During the past four hundred years I had known thousands of men, but none had drawn me as Merle did. From them I only wanted one thing—blood. From Merle I wanted—what? I was capable of no warm human emotions such as love, passion. Then what could Merle mean to me?

And yet the attraction was there, strong, undeniable, compelling. The sight of him brought to mind the thrill of forgotten things, the touch of his hand opened up closed doors of delight—delights I had once ex-

perienced with Feodore. That was it: more and more Merle and Feodore were merging into one personality for me.

It was nearly midnight when we left my hotel to seek a place to dance. Fifth Avenue was dark and deserted, but Broadway was at the height of its glory. Theater crowds packed the street; shop windows blazed with light to catch the late shopper, warmed by good food and drink, who spends liberally.

The night club Merle was taking me to was next door to a famous jewelry shop. As I stepped out of the taxi the glittering display of priceless jewels flashed into my eyes. How I loved them! How I thrilled to their glitter, their color, their brilliant sparkle and life! No matter how many I might own—and I was always flashing with them—I could never resist the sight of more. So, with a little cry of delight, I ran across the sidewalk and feasted my eyes on the dazzling display.

"You will allow me to buy you jewels?" whispered Merle's voice in my ear. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure."

I raised my eyes to answer, but the words died in my throat. I stared in horror. I was trapped! Before my eyes was a mirror, hideous, evil; it seemed to my terrorized eyes that the smooth glass laughed at me, mocked me—me, a creature of the night, who cast no reflection! With a frightened gasp I sprang out of the angle of vision. But my eyes, as if fascinated by the horror, remained fastened on the glass. It was blank! Merle, unconscious of the mirror, was standing directly in front of it—and all that was reflected were the people passing in the street!

Light hurt upon me. What a fool I had been not to guess! Merle was—even as I! Merle—Feodore! I dashed forward, snatched his arm

and pointed at the mirror. His face grew livid, his eyes distended with terror, he curled his fist as if he would smash the glass. Then he stared, and stared again. His eyes, in which light was slowly dawning, ewered from the blank mirror to me, standing there close beside him.

"You!" he gasped. "My Vera!"

"Yours, Feodore!" I whispered.

WE turned from the mirror to enter the night club. Between us there flowed a new understanding, a deeper sympathy. Incapable as I was of warm emotion I thrilled to the knowledge that Feodore was again mine. But suddenly I was struck by a thought. The hat! That other bat, hanging to the tree above Anita's grave! A faint shiver of anger shot through me. I turned to Feodore.

"Then you," I said coldly, "were the other hat at Anita's grave to-night?"

He turned suddenly, scowling. "You?" he said. "Were you there?"

"Of course I was there. Anita was mine."

"You are mistaken." His words were courteous but his voice shook with anger. "Anita was mine!"

I shook my head. I wanted to laugh in my triumph. His? Why even at this moment it was her blood that coursed through my veins!

"It is you who are mistaken," I told him. "I was the one that killed her. It was I who sucked her life blood into my own body."

For a moment I thought he was going to attack me. His face turned livid; his eyes blazed in the darkness like the blood-red eyes of a wolf, and he bared his long, evil fangs. A thrill of fear shot down my spine. He could not harm me. My powers were as great as his. But, safe though I was, I shuddered at the hideous picture he made. Then as swiftly as it had come his

fury died. Once more he was poised, handsome, adoring.

"We will not quarrel," he said gently. "There is nothing you could do, not even that, that would make me angry with you."

But we had almost quarreled. And the next evening, after sunset, as I lay in the warm bath Marie had prepared for me, I thought of the incident again. Another instant, if it hadn't been for his flash of self control, and he would have been at my throat. As I have said, he could not harm me to any great extent. But he could wound me: pull my hair, scratch my face, hit with his sharp teeth.

It was the same old story, I thought as I lay in the tub. The same bitter fight for sustenance that had forced me to leave Europe and seek more virgin fields in America. Long ago I had found that I must carry on my existence alone. But what of Feodore? We who had loved each other so much in life—was this coming between us now? I tried to believe it wasn't. I tried to tell myself that, after all, we had not quarreled the night before. But in the back of my mind still clung the memory of my thrill of hate as I had seen that other bat hanging to its tree.

AS I rose from the tub I suddenly realized I was faint with weakness. My finger-tips were numb, my lips colorless, my flesh flabby, my eyes no longer brilliant but dull. With a start I realized that two days had passed since I had fed. All thought of Feodore, of our quarrels and problems, faded from my mind. I must get nourishment for my failing body; I must bring back life and color to my gray and flaccid flesh. Blood! The very word had a splendid ring. Rich, dripping, life-giving blood! My mouth began to drool; my eyes grew dim with longing.

Into my mind flashed the picture of Anita's younger sister. Lovely she was, and young, and sweet, her mouth scarlet with the rich blood of youth, her cheeks glowing with health. But it was in the Gillett mansion that I had scented danger! Possibly it would be safer to seek my victim somewhere else? But the delicious picture of little Gloria Gillett persisted in my mind. My brain was aflame with the vision. I wanted the blood of Gloria Gillett, and nothing else would do!

"Open the window," I said to Marie: "I am going as a shred of mist. The danger may still be there, but a shred of mist is safe."

A moment later a hit of wind-blown mist was being tossed toward the Gillett mansion. I knew where Gloria's room was. It would be a simple thing for this hit of mist which was I to seep through a crack of the window. I trembled with eagerness: her throat would be young and soft, her flesh sweet, her blood thick and strong and warm! My brain blurred in dizzy anticipation.

I blew against the window pane of her bedroom. There was a crack where the window was dropped at the top! A shiver of delight swept over me. If only she were there. I could not endure the agony of waiting. I drifted through the window and stood, a puff of mist, in the middle of her bedroom floor. The room was empty. But from the bathroom beyond came the sound of voices. Voices I recognized! Feodore! Feodore and Anita! A surge of furious rage swept over me. Instantly I was standing at the bathroom door, a shred of mist no longer, but a venomous, enraged woman. They should not have Gloria! Gloria was mine!

**B**UT at the doorway of the bathroom I stopped aghast. On the rose-colored tiles of the bath-

room floor lay Gloria, limp and white, while over her, in a frenzy of hestial rage, Feodore and Anita fought like tigers for their victim.

"You can't have her!" snarled Anita. "She is mine—my own sister! Her blood is my blood!"

For answer Feodore flung her back, away from the fainting form of Gloria. His eyes were warm with delight as they rested on the beautiful body of the young girl, his lips drooped with desire. Into Anita's face flashed a gleam of jealous hatred. She hurled herself forward, kicking, scratching.

"You shan't have her blood! You had mine!"

A red haze throbbed before my eyes. So Feodore had feasted on Anita's blood! He had told the truth! I trembled with rage. I threw myself on them in an insane fury. In the first instant of their surprise at my attack they fell back before me. Instantly I dropped beside the body; my sharp fangs sank into the tender flesh; I gulped down the warm blood that gushed out.

Rough hands like cruel talons dragged me back; Anita wound her fingers in my hair. Feodore bent to the spouting wound. Anita and I fell upon him in a frenzy. Our teeth dug into the flesh of his neck; our fingers groped for his eyes.

A sudden alien noise made me look up. I sprang to my feet, terror gripping my heart. There in the doorway stood Mrs. Gillett and Jaffee. I felt as though my mind hurt with fright. Blind instinct was all that saved me. I vanished; and an instant later a little wind, a cold little wind that shuddered with fear, blew gustily down Fifth Avenue.

The whole experience had unnerved me, shaken me to the roots of my being. But I had managed to gulp enough of Gloria's blood to bring back my strength. After I had returned to my suite I lay

quietly, allowing the fresh blood to throb and heat through my veins. But there was more in my veins than blood. There was a throbbing, living hate!

Every time I thought of Anita and Feodore I shook with malignant, venomous fury. All the love I had felt for Feodore in life, all the sweet attraction I had known in the past days for Merle, was dead—and from its grave rose a possessive, all-absorbing hate. My fingers curled into claws as I thought of him. How I would love to tear his face, gouge out his glittering eyes, rip his smiling mouth! I hated him! In the darkness of my room I knew my eyes were gleaming like those of a hungry wolf.

All that night I fed my fury, nourished my hate. And I did more: I determined to get Gloria at all costs. Those fiends should never get her! They should never know the sweet freshness of her young blood. She was mine! Her blood was for me! I ground my teeth in a frenzy.

**N**O sooner had the shadows of dusk begun to settle on the following afternoon than I was out of my earth-filled coffin. One thought filled my mind; one desire pulsed through my body: I must get back to the Gillett mansion before Feodore and Anita got there. I must get Gloria's body before they reached it! My brain was afire with the vision of her; my veins burned with longing for her blood. I waited for nothing. Throbbing with eagerness I turned myself again into a little breeze and sped up Fifth Avenue.

But at the window of Gloria's room I stopped in dismay. On the window sill there hopped and strutted a pigeon—a pigeon with the eyes of Feodore! Such a gust of fury swept over me that I could

scarcely control myself. But I had to control myself. I had to yet outwit Feodore and get Gloria for my own. The window was open a crack. I chuckled. The first advantage was mine. The crack was wide enough for a breeze to filter through—but not large enough for a proudly strutting pigeon!

I flew into the room—Gloria's bedroom, heavy with the delicious, healthy odor of her youth, her good, strong blood. It was empty. But across the room, close to the bathroom door, I spied a tiny mouse. Anita! She was here too, waiting! It seemed that I would go mad with rage. How dared they come here? Gloria was mine! My mind was inflamed with fury and desire. I would get Gloria now if it took all my strength, all my wit, all my power. No one should wrest her from me!

Outside in the hallway I heard a soft step. She was coming! The door opened; lovely and sweet and young, she came into the room. My avid eyes were on her face, on her fair, soft throat, her rosy cheeks, her scarlet lips. One thought only filled my mind. I failed to notice that she left the door carefully open behind her; that her movements were strained and nervous; that she glanced around the room with something close to terror. I didn't realize, until it was too late, that she almost jumped at the sight of the small mouse and at the pigeon pecking at her window. At any other time I would have seen these things, have smelled the danger in the air, and taken warning. But not that time. I was blind to all else but my ravenous craving for Gloria's blood.

**S**LOWLY, deliberately she came into the room, crossed it and opened the bedroom window wide so that the pigeon might hop, unrestrained, across the sill. Then,



her face suddenly white with terror, she ran across the bedroom and almost plunged into the bathroom beyond. The pigeon and I followed her, hut Anita was there before us. With a cry of fury I materialized and flung myself on Gloria. Gone was all caution; gone was every instinct save that of greed, of thirst for blood, of jealous fury for my victim. My victim, who I would have at all costs! Behind me I could feel Feodore's hot, fetid breath—Anita's claws that dug and scratched. Then there was something else: a soft whispered word—a word that turned my blood cold and made my flesh creep—a word sacred to the Church!

I whirled. There, standing in the bathroom doorway, was a Holy Father, his fingers raised in canonical blessing! I shrank back, and my strength oozed out from my suddenly flaccid muscles. Dimly I was aware that Feodore and Anita had dropped back quivering with terror. We were trapped! Over the shoulder of the Holy Father I saw the white, horror-stricken eyes of Jaffee. Jaffee! My mind cleared. I saw it all. Jaffee had suspected me; his suspicions had grown to a certainty with Anita's death. It was Jaffee who had seen us fighting for Gloria the night before! It was Jaffee who had called in the Church!

My face twisted with the rage and agony of a trapped beast. I took a furious step toward him, and, protected as he was by the priest, he cringed before my hideous snarl.

"How did you know?" I shrieked at him. "What made you guess?"

His teeth chattered with terror; his eyes glazed; he cowered close to the Holy Father. "Y-you c-cast no sh-shadow!" he gasped. "I saw you, and I knew!"

WE had been deliberately trapped! In that instant of frantic terror I realized everything.

Gloria had been set as a bait. Now, too late, I remembered her leaving the hall door open; I remembered her opening the window to allow the pigeon to come in; and then her swift run into the bathroom, where we had followed her—straight into a trap!

But was it a trap? Did Jaffee and the priest know the full extent of our powers? Did they know all that was necessary to conquer us? A sudden, faint hope swept over me. Perhaps, even now, I could outwit them!

Feodore was now a large bat, wildly seeking a means of egress from the room. I became a breeze, invisible, fast—but I was beaten back: the bathroom window sill was smeared with garlic! In a frenzy I became a fly, and rose to the ceiling—but the priest in the doorway penetrated my disguise and I dropped back powerless. Anita, once more a tiny gray mouse, was running around the bathroom floor squeaking with terror.

Weakened by the odor of garlic and the terrible holiness of the man in the doorway I felt my power slipping from me. I could no longer control myself. Without my will I was slipping back into the form of a woman. Feodore, too, shadowy and weak, was rising from the bat's body.

The priest advanced. For an instant I stared in unbelieving horror; then I covered my face with my hands and cowered before him. From his extended finger-tips were falling crystal drops of Holy Water. They fell on my flesh, searing through to the bone. They fell on my hair, scorching, burning. I sank to the floor; the Holy Water took the last vestige of my power; I rocked with the agony of those terrible burns; tortured moans tore through my clenched teeth. . . . The pain was unbearable, and in vain I longed for unconsciousness.

THE priest and Jaffee brought in our coffins, heavy with the earth in which we had slept for centuries, except that Anita's earth was freshly dug and light. They drove us into them, weak and powerless as we were. My nostrils were filled with the odor of garlic, my brain heavy with the terrible stench of sanctity. Through it all I knew the horror that was in store for me, and tried to fight, tried to ward off that last hideous moment. But my arms were like lead, my powers gone. . . .

The priest was standing over me—in his hands a stake! My face twisted in agony, my eyes filled with venomous hatred—but I was powerless! I writhed and moaned; words of tortured promises fell from my lips—promises I would never have kept. But the priest was relentless. He placed the point of the stake above my heart. My terrified eyes saw him raise a

mallet. . . . A blaze of agony shot through my body . . . I writhed and twisted with the hideous torture. A shriek, straight from the throats of all the fiends of hell tore from my lips—a shriek that, mingled with those of Feodore and Anita, ripped through that house with all the wailing fury and despair of a lost soul.

My body crumbled to rot: I could see it go. My flesh was dust, gray, clinging; my bones were thick with mould. The stench of the grave filled the room.

My agony was gone—gone with the dust of my evil flesh—gone with the malignant spirit which had lived for so many centuries in my beautiful body—that hideous spirit which the priest had exorcised forever.

Gloria had come to. The priest and Jaffee led her slowly from that room of putrefaction, closing the door behind them. . . .

## The Spectre of the Brocken

FROM earliest times the Brocken, the loftiest peak of the Harz Mountains, in middle Europe, has been a commonly accredited seat of the marvelous. On its summits are still seen huge blocks of granite called the Sorcerer's Chair and the Altar, while not far away is a spring of pure water called the Magic Fountain—names supposed to have originated in the rites of the great idol Cortho, whom the Saxons worshipped in secret on the summit of the Brocken while Christianity was being extended over the adjacent plains.

Many times has one of the mountain's phenomena, the Spectre of the Brocken, been seen by observers, and not long ago a M. Gabrielle saw it after having deliberately sought it out for some time. On the morning of his success the sun rose about four o'clock through a serene atmosphere. In the southwest a brisk wind carried before it a transparent mist, which had not yet been condensed into thick, heavy clouds.

About a quarter past four M. Gabrielle went to a nearby inn, and, looking around, to take note of the visibility to the west, he observed at a very great distance a

human figure of monstrous size. As he stared at it his hat was tugged by a violent gust of wind, and on raising his hand to his head, to hold down the hat, he saw the colossal figure make the same motion.

He immediately made another movement by bending his body—an action which the spectral figure also repeated. He was anxious to make further experiments, but the figure disappeared. He remained, however, in the same position, hoping it would return, and in a few minutes it again made its appearance and mocked his gestures as before. He then called the landlord of the inn; both took the position he had at first been in; and two colossal figures appeared over the eminence. After a few more minutes, during which they bent their bodies and otherwise continued to imitate the gestures of the two spectators, the figures disappeared, this time for good.

But M. Gabrielle had seen that the Spectre of the Brocken was not a supernatural phenomenon. It was merely the shadow of the observer projected from the rising sun behind on the grey cloud curtain far out over the plains in front.



*In his hand he held  
the sacrificial knife.*

# When Dead Gods Wake

By Victor Rousseau

"MEET MAITLAND him come soon. Him say for you to wait," said the grave Indian boy who opened the door to us.

He led the way up two flights of stairs and ushered us into the long room that was Francis Maitland's own museum.

It was in darkness, but with a soft, sibilant apology, the Indian youth switched on the lights. They hung at intervals all along the room, disclosing Maitland's trophies—the stone figures that he had dug out of the pyramid of Xoctli, the inscribed lava blocks that had proved veritable stumbling-blocks to philologists tha

world over, the stone calendar and sun-dial showing the Mayan astronomical year, show-cases filled with ancient jewelry, and safes in which reposed still more valuable finds.

The museum occupied the second story of the old house in Bronxville. Maitland, who was a

bachelor of forty-five, owned the building, and resided there in the rare periods when

A thing of evil incarnate is Maitland's Mayan idol.

he was back in the United States after one of his exploring trips in Central America. Reserved, scholarly and retiring, totally unknown to the public at large, Maitland was the world's leading authority on the Mayan civilization.

I was one of his few intimates,

if the word could be used, and our association dated back to our schooldays. For all that, we met seldom, and I had only been in the museum twice before.

Adachi, the slim, spectacled Japanese, had made a special journey from Yokohama to see the results of Maitland's latest Guatemalan expedition, and I had met him at his hotel, at Maitland's own suggestion, to bring him around. I had found Felix Garth with Adachi, and both men had been extremely reticent.

OF course I knew Garth by reputation. He was the only American member of the Institut Metapsychique of Paris, and an authority on ectoplasm, materializations, paraffin ghost-gloves and astral cantilevers. Since Maitland had always struck me as a well-balanced individual, I had wondered what Garth was doing with Adachi, for he evidently expected to accompany us.

Adachi peered after the youth's departing form. "That fellow is a Mayan," he said. "Unmistakably so. Our friend must have brought him back with him from Central America."

A door opened at the other end of the museum, and Maitland came forward. He was wearing evening clothes; he had grown a brown, peaked beard since I had last seen him, and he looked handsomer, more virile—I might say more primitive—a fine figure of a man in early middle life. He greeted us warmly as I presented my companions, and I saw him shoot a glance of quick surmise at Garth. It was evident that Adachi had brought Garth with him at Maitland's own suggestion; there must have been some correspondence. Garth hadn't just crashed in.

There followed a few moments of desultory conversation. "Yes,

I've been back two months," said Maitland, "but I've been very busy. My trophies are still on their way, all except the one I'm going to show you. I brought it back on the same ship with me—wouldn't trust it on any other. Either we'd land in New York together, or we'd go down together."

He laughed in a strange, embarrassed way. I saw Garth glance at him sharply for a moment, as he had previously glanced at Garth. Then and there I knew that Maitland had been in communication with Garth about the trophy, whatever it was. But Maitland was already leading the way toward the farther end of the room.

"There it is," he said, with a wave of his hand.

WHAT I saw was one of those single blocks of stone with the upper part crudely carved into the representation of a human face, and hieroglyphics below—a Mayan idol, such as may be seen in most of the large museums. The face had the customary leer that primitive Mayan art shows, something at once murderous and cheap, as if an East Side gangster had liberated his soul in sculpture. This was just one of the repulsive gods the race had worshipped.

In front of this block, and forming part of it, was another mass of stone, about as large, but square instead of oblong, and reaching to the middle of the idol's body. Two roughly carved hands rested upon it, and it was hollowed upon the surface into a sort of shallow bowl, with three channels in it.

"A Mayan sacrificial stone," said Adachi, as if to signify that he saw nothing remarkable about it.

Maitland pointed to the hieroglyphics carved into its base. "I have hopes," he answered, "that this will solve the mystery of the

Mayan language. Some of these symbols are identical with those that were interpreted by Father Ignatius Gomez in the seventeenth century. You have seen his book in the Vatican? If I am right, this stone provides the key that will unlock many secrets of the Mayan civilization."

His words were impressive; but then he laughed in that embarrassed way again.

And then, in the light from the electric bulb that hung over the stone block, I saw that Maitland was, in some indescribable way, changed. Something had happened to him in the Guatemalan jungles. He had gone out a matter-of-fact scientist, he had come back physically more virile, more forceful, and yet mentally he was not quite the same.

THE Indian youth came gliding into the light. He went up to Maitland and whispered something, and Maitland nodded. I had not seen the Indian well before. Now I noticed that his face was an aristocratic one, aquiline, dignified, completely self-possessed. And I was amazed to see the ripple and play of muscle through the cotton singlet visible beneath his open jacket. Slight as he looked, the boy was a tawny Hercules.

"Yes, stay here, Pophonoc," said Maitland. He turned to us three again with his embarrassed laugh. "Pophonoc is anxious about the god," he said. "It's rather a curious story. I found this block at the head of a flight of stone steps in an utter wilderness. It's a sacrificial stone, of course, as you said, Mr. Adachi. The god is that of lightning and earthquakes, who had to be appeased every so often with the blood of a human being. He was also, as you know, the python god. Probably he had to

be fed whenever the half-tame pythons that the priests kept needed a meal themselves. You can see the symbol, Kent," he added to me.

Suddenly, as if they had only that moment appeared, I saw the two sculptured pythons, one on either side of the god's leering face. If the god's face was crude, the two pythons were marvelously realistic, from the end of the undulating bodies to the cruel, venomous heads.

"Pophonoc was the only human being anywhere near," continued Maitland. "So far as I was able to gather, he was the hereditary guardian of the god. Probably the charge had descended from father to son for several hundred years, and one of Pophonoc's ancestors was the last priest who actually performed the sacrifices. He made so much fuss when I sought to remove the idol, that I brought him along with it, and now he's quite contented."

Again came Maitland's strange, embarrassed laugh.

"WELL, gentlemen," he continued, "what I have asked you here for will sound like utter folly. But I happened to have some curious experiences in the Guatemala jungles which rather shook me out of my materialistic scientific complacency. Pophonoc, as I told you, made such a fuss at being separated from the idol, that I had to bring him along as a sort of compromise arrangement. He's made an excellent servant, but, since he's picked up a little English, he's tried to explain just what a bad mistake I made in bringing the god along with me.

"I'll pass over the horde of pythons that seemed to dog our footsteps all through the jungle, and the earthquake that rocked the port of embarkation, though our hotel was knocked down flat, all

except the extension in which we were housed. I'm not superstitious. But a very odd thing happened the other night. My dog, Ajax, is just a mongrel that I've had ten years, and I'd been boarding him in Bronxville while I was away. They got him!"

Suddenly I realized that, for all his matter-of-fact way of speaking, Maitland was laboring under intense emotion. There was a wild look in his eyes, and his speech was labored.

"I sleep in a room off the museum," he continued, pointing toward the door by which he had entered. "The dog slept on the floor beside my bed. I had locked the door. I swear I'd locked it. I always do, from force of habit. You have to in those tropical ports. When I awoke suddenly, Ajax was gone.

"I switched on the light, looked about the room, unlocked the door and came in here, much mystified. Gentlemen, my dog lay in this stone bowl, every bone in his body not merely broken, but almost pulverized. And only a python could have done that!"

He paused, then added, "Look at the stone pythons on the carved block, gentlemen! One of them's had a meal! Look at it and see! It was like the other before the dog was killed. It's swollen, swollen, swollen!"

I looked again. It was perfectly true that one of the pythons was abnormally swollen midway along the sinuous stone body, while the other retained the normal serpent shape. I hadn't noticed that before. But Maitland's explanation was of course preposterous. And I'm a pretty level-headed sort of man in the face of such things.

I looked back at Maitland and saw that he was laughing again. But now I realized that that was not the laugh of a sane man.

GARTH'S voice broke the silence. "I may as well tell you, Mr. Kent," he addressed me, "that I have been in communication with Mr. Maitland since his return. Our first meeting was accidental, but I was able to offer him a certain line of investigation which he is inclined to follow. Mr. Maitland wanted you, as an old friend, to be present, but he was uncertain how you would regard the matter."

"I may as well reply," I said, "that I am not favorably inclined toward spiritism. I am not so foolish as to deny that there is probably a substratum of truth beneath some of those phenomena, but the invariable encounter with fraud disgusts me. Furthermore, whatever may be the underlying causes of those phenomena which are true, I can approach them only from the viewpoint of a scientist. That is to say, I should regard them as demonstrating the existence of some unknown laws of nature."

Garth laid his hand on my shoulder. "Spoken like a man of science, Kent," he answered. "Yours is exactly the type of mind we need and so rarely find. If you are not unwilling to participate in our séance to-night—"

"Séance?" I returned.

"The Indian, like all votaries of the priesthood among savage races, is a medium. Now don't get on your high horse, Kent," Garth added, smiling in a way that robbed his words of any offensiveness. "I mean that he has the faculty of going into that cataleptic state which we call trance. We can count you in?"

"Surely," I answered, "if I may reserve my own conclusions. But is the Indian willing to cooperate?"

"He is more than willing," answered Garth. "He has been trying to persuade Mr. Maitland to cooperate with him, but it is only

recently that he has acquired enough English to make his wish understood."

"I hope you'll join us, Kent," said Maitland nervously. "I—I'm counting on you, as an old friend. I—" He turned to Garth with a helpless gesture. "Please take full charge of the proceedings, Mr. Garth," he said.

Garth nodded, turned, and beckoned to Pophonoc, who had glided up to our little group. Pophonoc nodded. I was again struck by the boy's air of dignity and self-repression.

FOUR chairs were brought and placed in a semi-circle about the altar. Pophonoc vanished and reappeared. He had cast off his western clothing and wore nothing but a loin-cloth of some native material. And I had not been mistaken in my estimate of his physical strength. His splendid copper-colored body was one surge of rippling muscles.

"Did you ever see such a man, Mr. Garth?" I whispered. "He'd make his fortune as a physical culture instructor."

Garth inclined his head slowly, but did not answer me. On my other side, Adachi was bending forward, watching the Indian. Pophonoc had fallen on his knees, and, with extended arms was invoking the stone idol in his native language; in slow, rolling, sonorous syllables that, in spite of my desire to remain unprejudiced, succeeded in creating a sense of awe in me.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. As I said, Pophonoc had worn nothing but a small loin-cloth, and yet, of a sudden, he held a squawking fowl in his left hand, while his right held a sharp stone sacrificial knife. He placed the bird on the stone bowl. It remained there, silent now, head down, as

if hypnotized. Pophonoc turned and spoke to Maitland, who addressed us in strange, jerky tones. "He asks for darkness and strict silence during the experiment," he said. "Kent, will you take charge of the lights? I have installed a switch that controls them all. You'll see it hanging down beside the bowl."

I bent forward and saw a slender cord with a push-button in a handle at the end. I picked it up. "Ready?" I asked Maitland.

He nodded, and I pressed the button. Instantly all the lights in the museum went out. We could see nothing now except the faint reflection from the streets against the drawn shade at the end of the studio. We could hear nothing except Pophonoc's soft monologue, growing softer and more broken, and terminated by the sudden thud of the knife against the stone, and a frenzied flapping of wings.

SILENCE and darkness! I could barely see the outlines of Adachi on my right and Garth on my left. I could not see Maitland at all. No sound came from the stone altar. Yes, there was a sound, horrible in the darkness: a steady, slow, dripping sound. . . . I wanted to press the button again, but I had not the moral courage to confess my fears. I was awaiting Garth's or Maitland's order.

And then, as I sat there, a new and noxious odor began to penetrate the room. It was something vile, something compounded of the stench of a rain-drenched swamp and noisome bodies. A hot breath seemed to emanate from in front of me. Imagination painted pictures in the darkness. I seemed to see a dim form elongating in front of me. I heard a sound now, a steady, rhythmic breathing, coming from the bowl. And suddenly Garth's voice rang out sharply.

"The light, Kent! The light! The light!"

I heard him leave his chair. He bounded forward, and I heard the sound of two bodies struggling. I grasped the handle of the cord and pressed the button convulsively.

In front of the altar Garth was struggling with Maitland. Maitland's eyes were closed, and he seemed asleep; the struggles of his body seemed purely automatic ones. But in his hand he held the sacrificial knife, and Garth's fingers were locked around his wrist.

Kneeling before the altar was the Indian. His eyes were closed, but there was a smile of happiness upon his face, and his bare chest was strained upward in a strange fashion. The fowl had disappeared from the bowl, which was clean of blood.

Suddenly Maitland ceased struggling. He opened his eyes and looked about him in a bewildered fashion, and at the same time Garth whipped the knife out of his hand and hid it in his clothes. He led Maitland back to his chair, where he sat, still dazed, and apparently unaware of what had happened.

The Indian glided silently from before the altar and disappeared.

Suddenly Adachi uttered a low cry and pointed to the stone. I looked, and my heart beat heavily in dread. Was it imagination, or was the body of the second python now distended like that of the first?

THE events of that evening had upset us all. Maitland disclaimed any recollection of what had happened at the séance; he insisted that it had been uneventful, that he had been wide awake, and that no fowl had been brought into the room. In the face of that attitude, there was nothing for us to do but take our departure.

Two days later I received a curt

letter from him, in which he informed me that he was returning to Guatemala by the next boat. He expressed the hope that we should meet again, but the phrasing of the letter left me with the feeling that he had taken offense at having betrayed his weakness, and that he did not wish to see me again.

A month went by. Then, unexpectedly, I received a letter from Garth. He had known of my work at the Delancey Institute of Applied Sciences, presumably, for it was there the letter was addressed. He merely asked if I could find it convenient to meet him in his apartment in the West Nineties on the following evening at eight, but the postscript added, "If you can possibly manage to come, do so without fail."

I was not greatly surprised to find Adachi with him in Garth's apartment. There was anxiety on the two men's faces, and it was evident that they had been engaged in earnest discussion.

Garth sprang to his feet as the man-servant showed me in, and grasped my hand warmly. "Have you had any word from Maitland?" were his first words.

I told him of the letter I had received, and of the conclusion I had drawn from it that Maitland was offended with me.

"He wrote each of us a similar letter," answered Garth. "But he has not sailed for Guatemala. He has not left his house, except once or twice, by night, since that evening. Adachi and I, who believe more or less alike upon a certain subject, have been very anxious about him. Certain developments to-night make it essential in our opinion that your cooperation should be asked.

"I'll do anything I can for Maitland," I responded.

"Good," said Garth. "Please sit down."



"I HARDLY know where to begin," he said, after an embarrassed pause. "I may as well say, however, that, next to Maitland, Adachi is probably the greatest living expert on the Mayan hieroglyphics, which, as you doubtless know, have been deciphered only in a very limited way. It was in the hope of cooperating with Maitland that he came here from Japan."

He broke off. "If only Maitland had been willing to continue working with me!" he said. "I can tell you one thing, Kent; it was not shame that led him to break off the association. It was conviction."

Adachi nodded. "He had become convinced that night that certain things are true," he said, "things which we of the Shinto cult have always known to be true. Mr. Kent, surely you, as a follower of the scientific method, will admit that it is possible there may exist a world of intelligences—I won't say superior to, but different from our own?"

"You mean a world of spirits?" I asked.

"Let us call them rather entities of a physical order different from that which makes up the animal kingdom," he replied.

"I am prepared to grant the possibility," I said.

"We Japanese have always known this," he answered solemnly. "And so has every race that ever lived."

"What are you suggesting, Mr. Adachi?" I asked him.

"That the Mayan gods, like the Greek and Roman gods, like the fetish of the Negro and the idol of the Hindu have lived as truly as you and I are alive," said the Japanese. "That these gods are entities which are given existence by the combined belief of thousands of their votaries. When that belief fails, they die, or live in a state of suspended animation until called

back to life by a recrudescence of belief.

"The Mayan god of lightning and earthquakes, and of the python, whose name we do not even know, represented the ideas of generations of men, and had been fed by a hundred thousand bloody sacrifices."

PREPOSTEROUS as his words sounded, I could not but be impressed by the solemnity with which he spoke them. Garth, too, was watching me anxiously.

"Please go on," I said.

"I must tell you, Mr. Kent, that I was able to read some part of the hieroglyphics around the base of the stone block that night," said the Japanese. "I do not know whether Maitland was intentionally deceiving us in saying that the Indian, Pophonoc, was the hereditary priest of the god, or whether he was mistaken. But that was untrue. Have you read Fraser's 'Golden Bough', or are you familiar with the lines in Macaulay's 'Lays':

The priest who slew the slayer,  
And must himself be slain?

"I'm afraid not," I answered. "I haven't read a line of poetry since my schooldays, and I've forgotten most all that I have read. What is the reference?"

"There is a primitive folk custom, widespread throughout the world," answered Adachi, "and evidently common among the Mayans. It symbolizes the birth and death of the corn spirit. According to this, the altar of a certain god is tended by the priest who has succeeded in overpowering and slaying the former priest. He holds his functions until, grown old and weak, he is successfully attacked and killed by his would-be successor.

"I have not the slightest doubt

but that that young bronze Hercules, Pophonoc, overthrew and slew the last priest of the pythion god, and that the worship has been going on since the time of the Mayan empire.

"When he was surprised by Maitland in his jungles, in his awe of the white man he expected death at any moment. He believed that Maitland had come to slay him, and to become priest in his place. Gradually he began to understand that Maitland knew nothing of his god.

"Yet even on the night of the séance Pophonoc was convinced that Maitland meant to kill him. You saw him bare his breast to the sacrificial knife which Maitland, also entranced, held in his hand? I got on the job just in time to save him. Now—I do not know. But I do know that both the white man and the red are merely puppets animated by the souls of innumerable dead priests, and that gigantic evil forces are struggling through them both."

**I** LOOKED at the two men. I could hardly believe that I had heard them aright. Common sense reasserted itself. "It seems a big fuss about a mere idol of stone," I heard myself saying cynically. "You should understand, Mr. Kent," said Garth, "that an idol is something more than wood or stone. Under certain conditions an idol is able to prove that fact in a very convincing way. I have no doubt Maitland is thoroughly convinced by now. And I think that he and Pophonoc have between them succeeded in arousing a devil that is able to bring unparalleled evil upon this city of ours."

"How?" I asked.

"By imbuing the minds of a hundred gangsters with a mania for murder. By setting loose the devilish desires that sleep chained in

the hearts of a surprising number of us. And to-night we must save Maitland from that devil—or, if you prefer it, from himself." He looked at Adachi.

"I must say," said the Japanese in his soft voice, "the god is most powerful at certain phases of the moon. That night was the new moon; to-night when the new moon enters Aquarius is a time especially propitious. That is in a little less than three hours' time. You see," he added with a wry smile, "it is necessary for us to act at once.

Garth glanced at Adachi, and I saw his unspoken question, "Shall we tell him?"

**H**E glanced at me and read my answer. He drew some newspaper clippings from his pocket and handed them to me.

All of them had reference to the same subject, of which I had read in the newspapers, and the latest, from a newspaper of the day before, read in part as follows:

#### Another Bronxville Child Disappears

"Consternation exists among the negro population on the southern fringe of Bronxville at the disappearance of little Lily MacKenzie, aged four, the third colored child to vanish during the past ten days. Little Lily was sent to the corner grocery at Hudson and Pequot Streets just when it was growing dark last night. She never reached it, and nothing has since been seen of her. This third disappearance lends color to the general belief that a maniac kidnapper is at large. Police reinforcements have been drafted into the district, and no efforts are being spared to clear up the mystery. Meanwhile the colored population remains in a state of terror."

I handed the clippings back. "You mean—you think—" I stammered, feeling a chill of terror run through my body.

"Kent, I don't want to think!" cried Garth vehemently. "All I ask is that you will accompany us to-night."

"I'll go," I answered eagerly.

GARTH'S car was parked around the corner of the block, and we got in. He drove slowly—there was ample time—crossed the Park, and proceeded north through Harlem. We had gone some distance before I discovered what he and Adachi had with them on the floor beneath the projecting front seat.

There were two ordinary steel hatchets, but what their purpose was I had no idea, and, in default of volunteered information, I preferred not to question them. We were on the outskirts of Bronxville when Garth turned to me and said:

"Just one point, Kent. It is essential that you show no surprise and retain complete silence."

"You can rely on me," I answered.

"We need you more as a witness than as a participant. You will sit between us two, and I can reasonably guarantee that you will come to no harm."

I thought it expedient to smile, and, in fact, I was already experiencing a reaction from the fears with which I had read the newspaper clippings. The idea of Maitland, whom I had known all my life, of Maitland, the eminently sane, practical man of affairs, becoming the crazed votary of a hideous, long forgotten Mayan god was too ridiculous.

With that faculty of mind-reading that I had noticed in him before, Garth glanced back at me sharply, but he said nothing. We were threading the streets of Bronxville, and I noticed an unusual number of policemen at the street corners. Here, at least, was concrete evidence that a killer or kidnaper was at large. But Maitland! I forced a smile to my lips, and again Garth looked at me.

We parked the car in front of a row of stores which were brightly illuminated, and filled with purchasers. Here was no evidence of panic. No, what Garth and Adachi suggested was altogether incredible. I was half-ashamed that I had come with them on such a mission.

A policeman scrutinized us as we left the car. There was another at the corner of the side-street up which we had turned.

IT was only two or three blocks to Maitland's house. But in that short distance the whole atmosphere of the town changed. We had passed from the crude new highway to a region that had once been historic, and, though the great old houses had mostly been cut up into tenements, it still retained a certain air of dignity and aloofness. Maitland's house stood alone in a strip of lawn, with a rusting cypress tree on either side extending its branches above a decaying picket-fence. The new moon hung, a thin thread, in the sky.

Garth looked at his watch. "We're in plenty of time," he said.

"What are we going to do if Maitland's here?" I asked. "Take him away by force?"

"No," answered Garth. "This thing has gone too far. The devil that has been unchained must be destroyed before it destroys us all."

We pushed open the gate and entered. Garth tugged at the old-fashioned bell-pull, and I could hear it jangling and echoing through the house. I listened for footsteps within, but none came. I was convinced Maitland was not in the house. Garth's whole story was the product of a disordered mind.

Quietly Garth took a small steel implement from his pocket and began picking at the lock. Almost immediately footsteps sounded within; but they were the footsteps

of a man standing still and raising and dropping either foot alternately, to give the impression of movement. Garth stopped his operations; the lock clicked back, the door opened, and Maitland stood before us. I knew for a certainty that he had been crouching behind the door, listening.

He was in evening dress, as before, and he seemed to have dressed himself rather carefully, for there were black pearl studs in the front of his stiff shirt, and he even had a gardenia in his button-hole. He looked at us in well feigned surprise.

"Why, gentlemen, I'm delighted to see you all here," he said affably. "If only you had called up to let me know I might expect you—but, you see, I'm just starting out for the evening."

GARTH'S response amazed me. He stepped up to Maitland and tapped him lightly on the cheek, at the same time making a pass with his hand before his eyes.

For a moment Maitland stood just as he had been standing. Then his jaw fell, he shivered, he looked at us dully, as if he didn't know who we were. He breathed deeply. Then he recognized me.

"Kent?" he mumbled. "What brings you here? Oh, yes, I remember now. I wrote to you to come and see the trophies from my last trip. And these gentlemen must be Mr. Adachi and Mr. Garth, who were to have accompanied you. I—I've been asleep, I think. I'm not feeling very well this evening, but come upstairs and see my museum, gentlemen. I brought back some curious stuff—a sacrificial block and—"

"Meest' Maitland!"

The Indian had glided forward out of the shadows of the hall, moving so softly that he might have been one of the stone ser-

pents come to life. But there was nothing serpentine about Pophonoc. He looked in the pink of condition, a strong, vigorous, healthy youth. Only his eyes glowed with baleful fires as he turned them on Garth and myself for a moment.

"Meest' Maitland!"

There followed a phrase in Mayan, a movement of the hand, and a look of piteous uncertainty came upon Maitland's face.

"I don't want—I don't want—" he stammered. "Help me, Kent!" The words burst from his lips with almost a wail. And then the half-dazed look was gone, and Maitland was once again the suave, polished individual who had just met us at the door.

"Just starting out for the evening, gentlemen," he repeated. "But you must come upstairs," he added, as the Indian spoke again in a soft whisper. "It is so seldom I see you, that I feel inclined to sacrifice my appointment and ask you to look at some of my trophies."

I saw the look of triumph in Pophonoc's eyes. He was staring insolently into Garth's face. "Who is the greater, you or I?" he seemed to be asking silently.

As if taking up the challenge, Garth bowed and smiled. "I'm sure we'll all be delighted to accept your invitation, Mr. Maitland," he answered.

HE pushed past Pophonoc, and Adachi and I followed him. I had a pretty clear idea of what had been happening in the hall, though it had staggered me for a moment. Maitland had suffered an alternation of personality, and between the two beings alternately manifesting in him, there was no point of memory contact. I had heard of several such cases, and there was nothing uncanny about it, except that the submerged Mait-

land, now dominant, appeared to have been evoked by a single word from the Indian's lips.

"Kent," Garth managed to whisper to me, as I followed him up the stairs, "I guaranteed to-night that you would not be exposed to danger. I must withdraw that guarantee. Pophonoc understands that the battle is set, and that there can be no withdrawing. To attempt to leave this house would be the signal for a murderous attack on us. He knows, and so does Maitland, that they are booked for the chair, or for an insane institution. We must go through with our task."

"We're three to two," I answered. "Do you mean to say, if we wanted to escape, which I certainly don't, we couldn't overpower Maitland and Pophonoc?"

My anger rose. I resented the suggestion that we were trapped, three to two, by a savage and a man who was unbalanced. I was incensed at Garth's suggestion that we were in danger.

"Kent, you don't understand the situation," Garth whispered back. "It is for Maitland's sake. I want to save the man who appealed to us for help just now, the Maitland whom we three have known. To save him in spite of the man created by that Indian and his devilish rites—the madman, the child-slayer, the—"

**I** COULD not hear the rest, and I did not want to hear. I had seen enough to realize that the Indian youth was Maitland's malignant master. It was not necessary to put Garth's interpretation upon the situation to realize that we were in danger, and Maitland most of all. But I was quite at a loss as to what Garth meant to do, though Adachi seemed to know.

We entered the museum, and Pophonoc switched on the lights. Maitland was in the same affable

mood as when we entered the house, and yet I had the feeling that, in this alternating personality of his, he did not know us, was feeling his way, and, above all, responding to the unspoken commands of Pophonoc.

"Meest' Maitland think you want séance, hearum god talk," said Pophonoc insolently. "He wait for you to-night, hope for all sit together, maybe god tell him where mooch gold hided, yes?"

"That's what we came for," answered Garth, looking at his watch. "Tell him, Maitland, that the moon enters Aquarius in a few minutes now. In his own language, of course, there isn't any Aquarius. But you'll be able to make it clear to him."

"Ah, you are suggesting astrological influences, Garth?" smiled Maitland. He spoke to Pophonoc, who looked Garth full in the face. For the first time the Indian's easy insolence was not in evidence. Maitland had revealed to him that Garth was not the simpleton he had supposed. Yes, Pophonoc looked uneasy. He was afraid of the white man's knowledge, and he did not know how far Garth's went.

He scowled as he led the way toward the altar and drew up the four chairs again. This time it was the Indian who controlled the switch. At a touch from his hand, every light in the museum went out, except a tiny red one that hung high above the idol.

For a minute or two I could see nothing. Then, as my eyes grew accommodated to the darkness, a cry hung on my lips, and I compressed them forcibly to stifle it.

For both the carved pythons were hideously distended. Certainly they had not appeared that way when I was there a month before. But that was not the full horror of it.

For the outlines of the shapes

inside those hideous forms were those of little human beings.

MY brain reeled. In that moment I was convinced; I believed, I understood the foulness of this old Mayan devil that had come back to life, into our modern world, through Maitland's folly. I was going mad, I think; I felt Garth's hand touch mine, and something in that touch of his enabled me to pull myself together.

And then my fear was replaced by an elemental rage that would admit no fear. I had had a glimpse into the very depths of human wickedness, and I swore to myself, as a Crusader might have sworn, that this abominable thing should never come back to life to stay alive and trouble the kindlier earth of to-day.

I felt Garth's hand touch mine again, approvingly, as if he had read my mind. I bent forward and saw the stern aspect of Adachi's features. He, too, was ready to battle against the abomination.

Maitland had settled himself in his chair. His head drooped on his breast. Pophonoc had flung himself upon his knees again, and his soft, rhythmical invocation of the god filled the place with cadenced music.

So dim was the little light that I could see only the vague outlines of the Indian's form. But gradually Maitland's heavy, stertorous breathing began to rise above the words. It was hard to sit there, not knowing what was going to take place—to feel that sense of infinite evil that brooded over the altar, and not to know what to do.

Yet I had complete faith in Garth. I felt him press my hand once more. I felt the rigidity of his arm. The nervous tension in the place was growing almost unbearable. And Pophonoc's droning chant went on and on.

It changed. The Indian had risen to his feet. Facing the idol, he poured forth what sounded like an impassioned oration.

It ceased. He sank to his knees again. Maitland's breathing had grown frightful. The breath whistled through his lungs in hoarse, whining spasms. The light above the altar seemed to be growing dimmer.

I WAS falling asleep. There was no longer any sensation in my limbs. My eyelids seemed borne down by leaden weights. I could not stir. I felt Garth's hand gripping my wrist, heard him whispering in my ear, "Keep awake, Kent! Keep awake as you value your life and your immortal soul!"

With all my power of will I sought to obey him. Desperately I fought back that somnolence that was overpowering me. I managed to keep my eyelids apart, to focus all that was left of me in the faculty of sight. But that was all that I could do. I was cataleptic, helpless, and barely conscious of my surroundings. Only the sense of mortal peril helped me in that fight.

And now once more I was conscious of that vile, sickening, sweetish, earthy smell in my nostrils. Hot, fetid blasts were blowing toward me from the idol. And then something happened that shocked me into an alertness that helped me in my battle. Was it imagination, or was something stirring on either side of that carven, leering face?

It was not imagination. Little ripples seemed to be running up and down the stone. The stone was moving, undulating. *The carved pythons were alive!*

I would have cried out in horror, but no sound issued from my lips. The bodies were moving, tremors were passing up and down

the carven coils. And the vile serpent faces were moving, too. Imagination? No, incredible truth! They were turning upon the coils of heaving flesh, distended to bursting point by their abominable meal. They were turning toward me.

And something else was happening. The stone block was growing longer. It was elongating toward the ceiling, and the face of the leering god was no longer carved on the stone, but raised above it!

The impulse to sleep had passed, but the catalepsy remained. I could not stir. I saw the serpent coils stretching toward me, loop after loop of quivering flesh. I felt the hot, noisome breath upon my face. It couldn't go on, or I should become a demented, raving, mindless thing. My brain was bursting.

And over the altar towered a hideous being, shadowy and vague, yet growing momentarily more clear. Its face was the leering face of the carven god, but infinitely more cruel and hideous, more murderous and obscene.

**T**HE end came. The place was filled with tumult, with leaping bodies. I heard a scream of terrible intensity break from Maitland's lips, saw him leap forward to where Pophonoc crouched beside the bowl. Simultaneously I saw Garth and Adachi leap from their seats on either side of me.

In their hands they held the hatchets that they had brought with them, and I saw them hacking at the coils that were entangling them, struggling like Laocoon and his sons in the famous sculpture.

I felt one of the coils pass over my head and tighten about my neck. Stone? No, this was flesh and blood, cold, slimy, infinitely strong. And with the horror of it the catalepsy passed. I was on my feet, screaming with horror, and fighting madly to free myself.

I saw Adachi's ax descend. He had lopped off the coil a foot from my body, and the writhing segment dropped to the floor, leaving me free. I stumbled forward with the idea of rendering aid to Garth, who was still struggling in the coils of the second serpent. But a more fearful scream issued from Maitland's lips. And the sight I saw was more dreadful than what I had seen hitherto.

By some demoniac light which, I swear, never emanated from the little red bulb, I saw him standing over the body of Pophonoc. In one hand, raised aloft, was the sacrificial knife of stone, and in the other Pophonoc's heart, torn from the living flesh in the manner of the old Mayan priests.

A blinding flash of lightning followed, and then a peal of thunder that seemed to shake the room. It shook me from my feet. Next moment I was struggling amid the débris that was raining down on me. The whole building seemed to be collapsing. A beam dropped from above, pinning me to the floor, which was collapsing too. I felt myself falling into an abyss. I knew no more.

**I**T was in a private room in a hospital that I came back to consciousness hours later. One of my legs, as I discovered afterward, had been broken, as well as two of my ribs, and there was hardly a sound spot on my body. Garth was seated beside me, and, as I recognized him, the whole horrid scene came back to me.

Garth leaned over me. "Kent, do you remember?" he whispered.

I nodded feebly. I heard his voice in my ear, "Say nothing, and ask no questions. You're doing finely now. In a day or two I'll tell you everything."

It was the nurse who told me that the house in which Maitland was

entertaining us had collapsed, owing to some subterranean explosion, burying us in its ruins. Maitland had been drawn out crushed almost beyond recognition, she admitted, and an Indian servant whom he had brought back with him had perished likewise.

"You might have thought they had been pulverized in some mighty engine," was the way a doctor put it later.

Some local fault in the subsoil, an explosion of natural gas, the seeping in of water to the foundations—such were various theories advanced by the press. Nearly the entire building had been submerged, and Maitland's trophies had been buried beneath a pile of wreckage that was merely leveled off and never disturbed.

Through all this information I kept my mouth shut tight, as Garth had instructed me. But I knew already—I knew because I believed—that it was the fury of the baffled earthquake demon that had wrought the destruction.

IT was not until I was able to be conveyed, by special arrangement, to Garth's apartment, for convalescence, that he and Adachi explained to me the part that they had played that fearful night.

"You must try to visualize Maitland," Garth began. "He had had certain experiences in the jungles, as he told us, which had shaken him from his firm materialistic viewpoint. Also he had profaned the sanctuary of the jungle god. So long as he held firm to his contemptuous disbelief in the supernatural, he was unassailable, for there is no power on earth or under it can shake the human will.

"It was when he began to doubt that he laid himself open to the insidious workings of a diabolical power, which was struggling back to existence after a sleep of more

than a thousand years, aided by the spells of Pophonoc.

"It was the sacrifice of the fowl that first gave the demon strength to manifest itself. It was the later sacrifices—we won't dwell upon those—but, as Homer says, it is through blood that the dead obtain the power to assume visible form. I have no doubt but that Maitland was possessed by some dead priest, who came to control him gradually.

"Finally came the long contest between Pophonoc and the dead priest for the supreme control. One had to kill the other, in order to serve the god. It may be that the Indian let himself be killed, as a supreme sacrifice. . . .

"WHEN we went there that night, both Pophonoc and Maitland resolved upon our death. Adachi and I had foreseen that. We took with us those hatchets. Steel, or iron, rather, as you probably know, was considered a supernatural weapon in the age of stone. Its presence was held to nullify all the power of the presiding demon.

"It was the presence of the steel hatchets, rather than their cutting power, that saved us. I doubt whether the sharpest flint would have sufficed to cut the coils of those serpents, materialized from the stone by the art of Pophonoc."

He ceased, then looked at me quizzically. "You are something of a skeptic still, Kent?" he asked.

"I've seen enough to teach me that credulity is sometimes wiser than the wisdom of the scoffer," I replied. "But—Maitland? He was my friend. . . ."

"I think," put in Adachi, "that though Maitland will have grievous punishment to bear for his lack of wisdom, that wasn't Maitland. Only his body—"

"No," said Garth, "that wasn't Maitland."





*She could see wraithlike figures hovering close.*

## The Thirteenth Floor

By Douglas M. Dold

**I**N the dusk-filled boudoir the blue, fluorescent mist thickened and grew steadily, and presently a whisper sounded faintly in the silence. But neither the maid nor her young mistress noticed. They could not notice, because the mistress was too intent upon having the maid leave her, and the maid

was too intent upon remaining.

Lois Carnchon had to command twice before her maid, Marie, pale and trembling, showed any sign of stirring from the boudoir. And even

then the girl moved only as far as the door.

"Mam'selle Lois, 'ow can I

leave you! Oh, mon Dieu, you are so beautiful and so—so streecken!

"Only very happy houses lack a thirteenth floor. . . ."

You mus' not be left alone 'ere in your room in zis great 'ouse wiz ze sairrvants downstairs, so far away. Your tragedy it is too, too great! Let me stay, ma chérie! I beg—"

Only the quiet, penetrant, final tone which the Carnchons used very occasionally enabled Lois at last to work her will. . . .

After Marie had shut the door and pattered fearfully away down the echoing marble hall, Lois, wide-eyed, tall, golden, stood still for a time. Then she turned to her dressing table and took up from amongst the litter of gold toilet implements and amber and jade phials of delicate scent, the yellow-sheathed extra which she had surprised Marie reading here five minutes ago.

The headlines of the extra informed her that Ronald French had crashed his plane in Los Angeles while piloting himself to victory in the International Amateur Sweepstakes.

Her heart informed her that if Ronnie was gone, neither her beauty nor her wealth nor her position were any good to her any more—nothing was any good to her.

While she gazed tearlessly at the paper, the blue mist began to shape itself into something which resembled a human form. But Lois was very intent upon another matter. In her bathroom cabinet stood a bottle of oxalic acid with which Marie occasionally rinsed stains from the porcelain fixtures. It would be hideous stuff to manage, she thought, but it was ready for instant use, and that was what counted.

**S**HE entered the bathroom and took the bottle from its place on the highest shelf of the medicine cabinet. Deciding quickly that it would be best to go to her bed, where she could stifle her groans in the pillows, as acid drinkers had

done from time immemorial, she snapped out the bathroom light and turned. And then, in the doorway between bath and bedroom, she stopped quite still. The sudden tension of her right hand nearly shattered the bottle of the skull and cross-bones.

On the edge of the bed, looking at her, sat a white-haired old man with a tortured face. Shimmery. Real, yet evanescent. The rich blue silk of the dressing gown he wore was sticky and sodden with the blood which welled from a wound under his heart.

"Uncle John," Lois whispered.

"Yes," came back in a whisper lower still, a thready whisper. "I am John Carnchon who died fourteen months ago rather than face the poverty left me by a certain drop in stocks. . . . I must talk with you, Lois."

"Why?"

"You know why. Because of that bottle you are holding."

"Ah. . . . You have come back across the border to try to dissuade me?"

The old man sighed. Slowly the blood from the wound under his heart seeped down the blue robe until it began to drip upon the floor in a dark puddle. Yet Lois now found herself above being affected either by that or the old man's presence. Death loomed so close that Uncle John's appearance seemed natural; and the greatness of her own suffering prevented her from understanding his.

"Why do you do it, Lois?" he asked suddenly.

"You know what happened to Ronnie French this afternoon?"

"Yes, my dear, but even so. . . ."

"Uncle, I can't go on without him. The only possible thing—" Her hand closed tightly about the bottle.

"Lois." The whisper became louder, almost stern. "Lois, look at me

well—at the agony in my face; at my blood. Does that not make you ask yourself if you are acting wisely? Does that not make you hesitate?"

She shook her head.

**A** GAIN the old man sighed. "You see what is there, but you do not understand. Your suffering is so intense that it prevents you from understanding. Poor child. . . . Lois, if I commanded you to put your hottle aside, would you obey?"

"If death," she answered simply, "brings any insight at all, you must know that I could not."

A long silence followed. A silence in which the old man and the girl each suffered according to their own destinies. Then:

"Lois, since you refuse an order to put your hottle back where you found it, and since you suffer so greatly that you are blind to the warning a dead man has come here to give you, *will* you do one thing for me?"

"What?"

"Will you, instead of drinking the acid here, go to the Hotel Belton to do it?"

"Why, that is where you. . . ." She started a little.

"Yes. I want you to go to the hotel and register, and I request that when you do so, you insist upon having a room on the fourteenth floor or higher. After that, I request that you walk up to your room. Remember those two things: the fourteenth floor or higher, and walk up to your room. Will you do it for me?"

Lois stood very still for a time. The bedroom was almost dark now. It seemed to her that the figure of the white-haired man, her uncle, was becoming less distinct.

"I will do what you ask," she answered finally. "I am afraid that you can never prevent me from join-

ing you, but I feel as if you had tried to help me. . . . I am grateful."

"Good." The whisper came faintly indeed.

As she moved toward the bed, the shimmer there vanished, and the dark pool on the floor.

Though the conversation with a dead man had been a thing unparalleled in her experience, she felt no fear. Now that she herself was so close to death, it seemed but natural that she should speak with the dead.

**S**HE managed to leave the house without exciting suspicion by requesting the butler to tell the other servants that she felt better and was going for a walk. A taxi which she signalled on Fifth Avenue, just below the great Carnahan house, bore her slowly through the heavy traffic of the evening toward the Belton.

Beyond the park the sun had set, and lights were beginning to twinkle; the faces which filled the cars about her, the faces of pedestrians on the sidewalks, showed that that day had been fine and that the world seemed good to many. Yet always she heard the shrill cries of newsboys calling the extra, and always she saw only one face, Ronnie's. . . .

A block away from the Belton she left the cab. It was impossible to sit longer, inert, while the driver wormed through the last interminable traffic. Her suffering was too great.

Indeed, as she stood at the edge of the sidewalk, with clattering trucks, squawking cabs, sleek limousines streaming past endlessly, her tearless grief became unendurable. And suddenly a thing which was almost inevitable happened, despite her original sincere intention of keeping her compact with the dead. She asked herself why she

should obey that old man, her uncle. The Belton was so far away still. The downward tide of traffic had just been released by the officer in the center of the street. If she hurled herself into the midst of it. . . .

**B**UT even before her resolve became firm, she gave a start and drew back. Out in the street a whistle was shrilling frantically. Brakes screeching, the down traffic came to a halt. Wonderingly, as she gazed at the man with the whistle, she saw that he was startled and unnerved, that he had become a puppet worked by some power outside himself. So great was the power that it even made its puppet signal brusquely to her to pass in front of the raggedly halted line of vehicles. The last she saw was that the man had released the cars again and was holding his hands over his eyes. In her ears sounded a thready whisper. "The Belton. Fourteenth floor. Walk up."

"I want a suite on the fourteenth floor or higher," she found herself saying to a desk clerk a few minutes later, as she wrote her name none too steadily on the registry card the man had handed her.

The headlines of the extra glared at her from a table behind the clerk's wicket. And the man knew her, had known her uncle. It was plain that he was troubled by her appearance, unattended, at the hotel. She forestalled interference, however, by assuming a manner which he could not readily question, and then, thinking quickly, she cut off his inevitable question about luggage by saying that hers would follow.

"No need for you to come up, Charles. I believe I've been in 1420 before. I will ring if I need you."

"Thank you, Miss Carnchon, very much!"

**T**HERE was no one else to trouble her now. In the crowded lobby it was easy to mingle with sauntering groups while she moved toward the first of the many flights of stairs which she must ascend. She heard two men in front of her discussing the smash and herself in connection with it. They seemed to feel that it was a tough break for the girl, especially as the papers had it that her feeling for French was above ordinary; but they also seemed to feel that the Carnchon income would help her get over it. Perceiving, as she never had before, the actual worth of her money, she hugged closer under her arm the handbag which contained the small bottle, and went on until she felt the soft carpet of the first staircase under her feet.

She had not reached the first landing before she knew that she was being watched, guarded, and almost guided. Try as she might, though, she could see nothing. Nor was the whisper there. It was only a sense of being surrounded by presences which would close in and cut off retreat should she turn back, or seek an elevator. Constant crushing memory of her loss made a feeling of leaden fatigue, of hopelessness steal over her. Too, she began for some reason to feel almost as if she had been drugged. But there was no fear of the entities.

On the landing between the eighth and ninth floors, when her feet dragged so heavily that she wondered whether she would ever reach the fourteenth and the oblivion she sought there, she sat down to rest. Looking about her, she realized in a dull way that this landing was identical with all the others she had passed. There was a window which overlooked the city; an ornate, soft lounge, potted palms; and, facing each lounge, almost filling the space between

the two floors, a tall mirror. . . . While she sat on the lounge looking into the mirror, she thought she could see a group of wraithlike figures hovering close, stealing furtive glances at her. They vanished, though, when she looked hard. She arose, mounted slowly to the ninth floor, and thence to the tenth and the eleventh.

"There is no thirteenth floor in this hotel," she thought dully as she gained the twelfth floor and turned to face the upward steps which would carry her to the fourteenth. "There is no thirteenth floor in most hotels. Many are superstitious, and that is why. . . ."

AND that marked the end of the first phase of her peculiar experience. No sooner were the words about the thirteenth floor in her mind, than a dry whisper sounded beside her, and she knew that some change had come.

"You're wrong about the thirteenth floor," the whisper creaked. "There *is* a thirteenth floor, and, my dear, it's crowded. All permanent guests. God help us."

She stopped climbing and stood still, halfway up the steps which led to the landing between the twelfth and fourteenth floors.

There was a thirteenth floor? A floor filled with permanent guests? . . . Dear God, what did it mean? And what was happening to her?

Why it was she could not say, but all at once the apathy which had made her fearless so long left her, and remembrance of the dry, husking whisper which had sounded in her ears filled her with horror.

"Uncle John," she whispered through a throat suddenly constricted, "is that you?"

Against a tapestry depicting a wine cellar in an abbey, a shadow moved oddly.

"Uncle John! *Uncle John!*"

Just above her, where the shadow

had passed, grew on the steps a slowly widening pool of dark red. Blood was dripping heavily from a wound. No wraith of a form became visible, though, and no one spoke.

"Oh, my God! Uncle, what have you made happen to me? I wasn't afraid at first. But now—"

What had happened? What was there about the thirteenth floor which should— She did not know, but quick as a flash she knew she could not stand it. The elevators! She whirled to run back down to them, a scream welling up behind rigid lips.

"But you can't scream!" sounded in her ears.

And she could not. And bloody prints of naked, spongy feet slopped out on the steps below. Prints from invisible feet. Prints that barred retreat every time she tried to get away from the hideous staircase. Clammy as the touch of putrescent corruption, a hand gripped her shoulder.

"The stairs!" came a rasping order.

IT was a terribly changed Lois who reeled about and faced upward, coerced by what seemed the ultimate power directing the universe. Gone the girl so stunned by shock that she could not understand the torture gleaming redly in an old man's eyes. In her place, a palpitant, golden girl confronted by stark horror.

She was standing halfway up to the landing above the twelfth floor. Since the stairs could not be avoided, the only thing was to run and keep running until she reached the fourteenth floor, and the warmly lighted corridor, and people who would come out of friendly doors at her cry. She did run, and knew that she was making headway because there flashed into view the potted palms, the ornate lounge, the mirror of the landing between

the twelfth and fourteenth floors. Panting, striving wildly to reach steps which would carry her higher, she gained the landing and swung to the right—and tripped across a thing which yielded like the flesh of an invisible corpse.

A faint moan reached her ears. She fell.

After a time she realized that she had fallen across the lounge. And knew that there could be no escape. The spongy prints of naked, bloody feet guarded the stairs. If she moved, cold hands sought her ankles, pressed soggly against her shoulders. She sank back against the cushions.

"You must see what here is to be seen," whispered someone out of nothingness. "It is true that a premonition of what exists here broke through your apathy a moment ago and left you afraid. It is true, that even as much as you have seen would make you think twice before drinking the contents of the bottle in your bag. But now you must see all, for you could have been spared the ordeal only had you understood the warning and obeyed the command which was given you back in your bedroom. . . . There are reasons why you must not try to end your pain. You must see all, and then decide."

For a moment she beheld her own lovely image reflected in the mirror. Then, across the crystal, whirling and swirling, drifted a gray smoke out of which grew eyes—horrible, tortured eyes. The mirror remained no longer; in its place loomed an open corridor, dark and gloomy, lit wanly by a phosphorescent glare.

She could not move. Her will was gone.

"COME!"

Her uncle was standing beside her, his eyes swollen with pain, his face stern, his voice loud-

er than she had yet heard it. There was no resisting him, and she arose; or at least some part that seemed herself, arose. Together they took a step forward.

The corridor did not vanish. Instead, the refracted, sulfurous light grew stronger, and, as the old man extended his arm that she might steady herself upon it, she saw that the place was thronged with people.

Men, women, garbed in an unnatural array of nightgowns, street dress, evening clothes. A sweeping skirt, dating back to 1908 made her realize in a dim way that the Belton had taken in its first guests in that year. There was a deadness to the air, and no man or woman breathed. Many were hideous with wounds and terrible disfigurements which gaped in their flesh. The expression of white faces was agonized beyond the power of human senses to comprehend.

"This, ladies and gentlemen," John Carnchon announced in a stiff, creaking voice, "is my niece, Lois Carnchon. You know my niece's story. Greet her and then continue with what is ordained."

Lois found herself powerless to cry out, and never for a second did the arm which supported her relax its powerful grip. While the hideous ones drew closer, darting furtive glances, whispering dryly amongst themselves, while they approached, never touching her, but always reaching with puffy, dead hands, she tried to close her eyes only to find that in this place eyes never closed.

"This, Lois," her escort told her, "is the thirteenth floor of the Belton."

"But there is no thirteenth floor! Above the twelfth floor stands the fourteenth. There is no thirteenth floor!"

"Yes," came in a sure, mournful tone, "there is a thirteenth floor. There is such a floor in nearly

every house in every city in the world. Only very happy houses, or houses new and never inhabited, lack a thirteenth floor. Watch!"

SHE breathed an odor of death and stagnation. She wrenched backward. But she found herself held as by a strait-jacket.

"You must watch," said that mournful, leathery voice. "It is ordained."

And the group who had crowded close fell back to flatten themselves against the wall, nightgowns, evening clothes hanging dead upon them, wounds showing red, ghastly. The whispering ceased. The blue lights grew brighter. The corridor was a stage, long and narrow, brightly illuminated, a stage watched desperately by rows of burning eyes.

"Let me go! Uncle, let me go!"

"You may not go."

"I tell you I can't stand it. I am breaking!"

"You will not break. You will watch to the end. It is ordained."

To the smell of death was added an odd odor of hemp. Instantly fell upon the whole corridor a leaden silence. A tall man, fair haired, handsome but for his flabby mouth, shuffled forward, leading an hysterical, full-lipped woman. On one arm he bore a coil of new, hempen rope.

"Lovers who were denied each other through the bonds of marriage with another," John Carnchon said hollowly. "Instead of making something decent out of the cravings of a futile passion, they did this."

Out of the glaring blue of the corridor materialized a half visible garret room, moldy and dusty, with stark rafters jutting through the gloom of the peaked roof. Two discarded chairs, one with a broken back, teetered in a black corner. While the woman whispered inco-

herent sentences, mixed words of passion and despair, the man scraped the chairs over the floor to a spot beneath a rafter. With a penknife which he opened with a click, he hacked through the rope, and, working with twitching hands, tied in each of the two lengths of yellow hemp a hangman's noose.

AS the two mounted the chairs, and the man tested carefully the strength of the ropes which he had made fast to the rafter, a queer look came into their faces. Some urge of sanity from within seemingly made them hesitate. But the moment passed. More than ever the flabby weakness of the man's mouth and the unbridled hysteria in the woman's dark eyes stood out. About their necks the nooses were adjusted and drawn taut. They bade each other a craved farewell. The woman began to sob harshly. At a word from the man, they kicked away the chairs. . . .

Lois stood still, watching them die, unable to close her eyes.

The picture of the garret faded soon, and once more the corridor became visible, but now a change had come over its inhabitants. The men and women rocked back and forth in torture, and their shrieks and sobbing moans rose loud in the dead air.

"The thirteenth floor," whispered the old man, while with one hand he clawed spasmodically at the dripping wound under his heart. "Each time any one of us re-enacts his deed, all of us feel the whole pain of it. And it goes on all the time. All the time. . . ."

"Uncle, let me go! I am not dead yet. I have done nothing. It is not right that I should be made to see this! Let me—"

"You may not go."

Even then the blue light from the corridor was clouding again, and from the blur was emerging

another room. A room in a hotel, this time. A man distinguished in appearance, with beautiful thick white hair, was reading from a paper the news that Evan Markley's misappropriation of Gulf State National's funds had been detected and that Evan Markley was being traced.

**A**FTER a time Evan Markley rose and entered the bathroom. His touch on a switch flooded the room with light. From a shelf he picked up something with a black handle and a glittering blade. On a table beneath the light he placed a mirror, and then seated himself before the glass in such a position that the hand which held the razor might be truly directed.

Presently he moved his hand. Horror came into his eyes. He slumped forward across the table. An outflung arm sent the mirror to the white tiled floor with a crash. Then it was over, and he ceased to move.

"The thirteenth floor," came a whisper as the scene faded and the corridor with its pain-wracked throng became visible once more. "Night and day are one with us who dwell here. We do not sleep. During the reaches of time we murder ourselves over and over again."

The girl beside the old man could not even moan further protest. To her shuddering consciousness came an awful whisper.

"You will watch this. This is for you. Acid. . . ."

A tornado of rank mist blotted out the blue. Against the mist a blond girl in an evening wrap of ermine stood snarling abuse at someone who never answered. The girl was spoiled, beautiful. At the one who never answered she shrieked that she would get even, and jerked from under her wrap a bottle that reeked of carbohc acid. Straight to her petulant lips she carried the

bottle and drank furiously in long gulps.

When her agony had only begun, a look of consummate fear blazed into her eyes, and she hurled the bottle from her, wailing. But she wailed too late. A long splash of the acid which had spilled across the white fur of her mantle was eating visibly; and she had swallowed a yet greater amount. The girl tottered, collapsed, and lay on her side, convulsed.

**W**HILE the mist faded, and the blue corridor with its ranks of suffering inhabitants began to stand out clearly again, Lois stood transfixed. She was paralyzed. Her soul was cold. The power to think, even the power to feel, had almost left her. Knowing only that during this last wrenching tragedy something had broken in her, that some vital, far-reaching change had come upon her, she felt herself swaying.

"You have stopped thinking about the bottle in your bag," whispered the old man at her side.

"I ceased to think of that long ago."

"And you have even given up the futile thought of trying to escape."

"I know that I cannot escape so long as it is ordered that I remain here, and I know that to remain is good for me."

"And you are pitying us!"

"Yes," she gasped. "Oh, yes! I—I think I am not even horrified any more. It is all so pitiable! Oh, if only I could help you, help all of you, I would do anything, give anything!"

"Ah," whispered the old man, "but if you have learned to pity us, you have seen enough. . . ."

And even as Lois listened humbly to the words, she saw the blue fade out and felt herself swooping down through rushing, tearing layers of darkness.



SHE returned to consciousness to find herself at home in her own bed. Little Marie was bending over her. In a few moments she was lucid enough to understand from the torrent of excited, thankful words which poured out the moment she opened her eyes, that the manager of the Belton had found her lying on the landing between the twelfth and fourteenth floors, and had himself accompanied her home in an ambulance.

Marie did not ask questions about how she had come to be lying unconscious on that landing. Instead she moved quietly to the dressing table and turned back with the yellow envelope of a telegram in her hand.

"It came a vairy few minutes aftair you left the 'ouse, ma chérie," she said, and gave Lois the message.

Slowly, but with the quiet strength of a woman resigned to misfortune, Lois tore the flap. Slowly she unfolded the sheet which dropped from the envelope. With the thought brooding in her heart that this would bring sad confirmation of news she had received before, she yet took consolation from the knowledge that she could read and still go on bravely, steadily.

But the message was not the one she had expected.

She uttered a low cry.

"Ronald French," she read, "has suffered a fractured skull and three broken ribs, but he will recover. Resting quietly in hospital. Advise that you come to Los Angeles to be with him during convalescence if possible."

IT was an hour later, just as she was leaving her room to start for the train, that she saw the last of the white-haired old man. From a fluorescent mist which shimmered in one corner he emerged. And he was smiling.

"Ronnie loved you so much," he whispered, "that he was kept alive even though another, in his case, would have died. That made it necessary that you should be saved, and to us it was given to preserve you. . . . And see, Lois," he whispered on, pointing toward his heart, "what you have done for us! It is because you pitied us, my dear. . . ."

Staring with blue eyes which widened slowly, she saw that blood had ceased to drip from an open wound beneath the heart, and that the wound itself had healed.

## The Dancing Stones of Burian

MANY are the supernatural uses to which the various odd stones in the west of England were once put. Beyond the village of Lanyon stands the Menantol, or the "holed stone." The bardic priesthood used this stone for some purpose akin to the following superstition:

It was attested that serofulous children who were passed through the Menantol three times, and then drawn on the grass three times against the sun, were assured of a speedy cure. Even men and women with spinal diseases used to be passed through this magic stone, and all spoke for its great curative powers.

Ascribed to the Druids, there are in many parts of Cornwall circles of stones. Tradition says that they are there as everlasting marks of divine displeasure, being men and maidens who were turned

to stone for wicked profanation of the Sabbath.

In Burian are the dancing stones, commonly called the "Merry Maidens," and near them are two granite pillars called the "Pipers." They are said to be there because one Sabbath evening some of the thoughtless maidens of the neighboring village, instead of attending vespers, strayed into the fields where two evil spirits, assuming the guise of pipers, played for them some dance tunes. Forgetting the holy day they yielded to the temptation and danced. With their exercise their excitement increased, until the music and their dance became extremely wild—when a flash of lightning from the clear sky transfixed them all, tempters and tempted, and there in stone they still stand.



# Cassius

*A Complete Novelette*

By Henry S. Whitehead

## CHAPTER I

### *Brutus Hellman Has an Operation*

**M**Y house-man, Stephen Penn, who presided over the staff of my residence in St. Thomas, was not, strictly speaking, a native of that city. Penn came from the neighboring island of St. Jan. It is one

of the ancient West Indian names, although there remain in the islands nowadays no Caucasians to bear that honorable cognomen.

Stephen's travels, however, had not been limited to the crossing from St. Jan—which, incidentally,

is the authentic scene of R. L. Stevenson's "Treasure Island"—which lies little more than a row-

What is the little malevolent Thing that scuttles always through Can-evin's searching fingers?



*A small, sinister-looking animal dashed into the night outside.*

boat's journey away from the capital of the Virgin Islands. Stephen had been "down the Islands," which means that he had been actually as far from home as Trinidad, or, perhaps, British Guiana, down through the great sweep of former mountaintops, submerged by some vast, cataclysmic, prehistoric inundation and named the Bow of Ulysses by some fanciful, antique geographer. That

odyssey of humble Stephen Penn had taken place because of his love for ships. He had had various jobs afloat and his exact knowledge of the house-man's art had been learned under various man-driving ship's stewards.

During this preliminary training for his life's work, Stephen had made many acquaintances. One of these, an upstanding, slim, parchment-

colored Negro of thirty or so, was Brutus Hellman. Brutus, like Stephen, had settled down in St. Thomas as a house-man. It was, in fact, Stephen who had talked him into leaving his native British Antigua, to try his luck in our American Virgin Islands. Stephen had secured for him his first job in St. Thomas, in the household of a naval officer.

FOR this friend of his youthful days, Stephen continued to feel a certain sense of responsibility; because, when Brutus happened to be abruptly thrown out of employment by the sudden illness and removal by the Naval Department of his employer in the middle of the winter season in St. Thomas, Stephen came to me and requested that his friend Brutus be allowed to come to me "on board-wage" until he was able to secure another place.

I acquiesced. I knew Brutus as a first-rate house-man. I was glad to give him a hand, to oblige the always agreeable and highly efficient Stephen, and, indeed, to have so skilful a servant added to my little staff in my bachelor quarters. I arranged for something more substantial than the remuneration asked for, and Brutus Hellman added his skilled services to those of the admirable Stephen. I was very well served that season and never had any occasion to regret what both men alluded to as my "very great kindness!"

It was not long after Brutus Hellman had moved his simple belonging into one of the servants' quarters cabins in my stone-paved yard, that I had another opportunity to do something for him. It was Stephen once more who presented his friend's case to me. Brutus, it appeared, had need of a minor operation, and, Negro-like, the two of them, talking the matter over between themselves, had decided to ask me, their present patron, to arrange it.

I DID so, with my friend, Dr. Pelletier, Chief Surgeon, in charge of our Naval Station Hospital and regarded in Naval circles as the best man in the Medical Corps. I had not inquired about the nature of Brutus' affliction. Stephen had stressed the minor aspect of the required surgery, and that was all I mentioned to Dr. Pelletier.

It is quite possible that if Dr. Pelletier had not been going to Porto Rico on Thursday of that week, this narrative, the record of one of the most curious experiences I have ever had, would never have been set down. If Pelletier, his mind set on sailing at eleven, had not merely walked out of his operating-room as soon as he had finished with Brutus a little after eight that Thursday morning, left the dressing of the slight wound upon Brutus' groin to be performed by his assistants, then that incredible affair which I can only describe as the persecution of the unfortunate Brutus Hellman would never have taken place.

It was on Wednesday, about two P. M., that I telephoned to Dr. Pelletier to ask him to perform an operation on Brutus.

"Send him over to the hospital this afternoon," Pelletier had answered, "and I'll look him over about five and operate the first thing in the morning—if there is any need for an operation! I'm leaving for San Juan at eleven, for a week."

I thanked him and went upstairs to my elsta, after giving Stephen the message to Brutus, who started off for the hospital about an hour later. He remained in the hospital until the following Sunday afternoon. He was entirely recovered from the operation, he reported. It had been a very slight affair, really, merely the removal of some kind of growth. He thanked me for my part in it when he came to announce dinner while I was reading on the gallery.

## CHAPTER II

*I Make an Odd Discovery*

**I**T was on the Saturday morning, the day before Brutus got back, that I discovered something very curious in an obscure corner of my house-yard, just around the corner of the wall of the three small cabins which occupy its north side. These cabins were tenantless except for the one at the east end of the row. That one was Brutus Hellman's. Stephen Penn, like my cook, washer, and scullery-maid, lived somewhere in the town.

I had been looking over the yard which was paved with old-fashioned flagging. I found it in excellent condition, weeded, freshly swept, and clean. The three stone servants'-cubicles had been recently white-washed and glistened like cake-icing in the morning sun. I looked over this portion of my domain with approval, for I like things shipshape. I glanced into the two narrow air spaces between the little, two-room houses. There were no cobwebs visible. Then I took a look around the east corner of Brutus Hellman's little house where there was a narrow passageway between the house and the high wall of antique Dutch brick, and there, well in towards the north wall, I saw on the ground what I first took to be a discarded toy which some child had thrown there, probably, it occurred to me, over the wall at the back of the stone cabins.

It looked like a doll's house, which, if it had been thrown there, had happened to land right-side-up. It looked more or less like one of the quaint, old-fashioned beehives one still sees occasionally in the conservative Lesser Antilles. But it could hardly be a beehive. It was far too small.

**M**Y curiosity mildly aroused I stepped into the alleyway and looked down at the odd little thing.

Seen from where I stopped it rewarded scrutiny. For it was, although made in a somewhat bungling way, a reproduction of an African village hut, thatched, circular, conical. The thatching, I suspected, had formerly been most of the business-end of a small house-broom of fine twigs tied together around the end of a stick. The little house's upright "logs" were a heterogeneous medley of little round sticks among which I recognized three dilapidated lead pencils and the broken-off handle of a tooth-brush. These details will serve to indicate its size and to justify my original conclusion that the thing was a rather cleverly made child's toy. How such a thing had got into my yard unless over the wall, was an unimportant little mystery. The little hut, from the ground up to its thatched peak, stood about seven inches in height. Its diameter was, perhaps, eight or nine inches.

My first reaction was to pick it up, look at it more closely, and then throw it into the wire cage in another corner of the yard where Stephen burned up waste paper and scraps at frequent intervals. The thing was plainly a discarded toy, and had no business cluttering up my spotless yard. Then I suddenly remembered the washer's pick'ny, a small, silent, very black child of six or seven, who sometimes played quietly in the yard while his stout mother tolled over the washtub set up on a backless chair near the kitchen door where she could keep up a continuous stream of chatter with my cook.

I stayed my hand accordingly. Quite likely this little thatched hut was a valued item of that pick'ny's possessions. Thinking pleasantly to surprise little Aesculapius, or whatever the child's name might be, I took from my pocket a fifty-bit piece—value ten cents—intending to place the coin inside the little house, through its rounded, low entrance-way.

**S**TOOPING down, I shoved the coin through the doorway, and, as I did so, something suddenly scuttered about inside the hut, and pinched viciously at the ends of my thumb and forefinger.

I was, naturally, startled. I snatched my fingers away, and stood hastily erect. A mouse, perhaps even a rat, inside there! I glanced at my fingers. There were no marks on them. The skin was not broken. That rodent's vicious little sharp teeth had fortunately missed their grip as he snapped at me, intruding on his sacred privacy. Wondering a little I stepped out of the alleyway and into the sunny, open yard, somewhat upset at this Lilliputian contretemps, and resolved upon telling Stephen to see to it that there was no ugly rodent there when next little Asclepius should retrieve his plaything.

But when I arrived at the gallery steps my friend Colonel Lorriquer's car was just drawing up before the house, and, in hastening to greet welcome early-morning callers and later in accepting Mrs. Lorriquer's invitation to dinner and contract at their house that evening, the little hut and its unpleasant inhabitant were driven wholly out of my mind.

I did not think of it again until several days later, on the night when my premises had become the theater for one of the most inexplicable, terrifying, and uncanny happenings I have ever experienced.

### CHAPTER III

#### *The First Attack*

**M**Y gallery is a very pleasant place to sit evenings, except in that spring period during which the West Indian candle-moths hatch in their myriads and, for several successive days, make it impossible to sit outdoors in any lighted, un-screened place.

It was much too early for the can-

dle-moths, however, at the time I am speaking of, and on the evening of that Sunday upon which Brutus Hellman returned from the hospital, a party of four persons including myself, occupied the gallery.

The other man was Arthur Carswell, over from Hayti on a short visit. The two ladies were Mrs. Spencer, Colonel Lorriquer's widowed daughter, and her friend, Mrs. Squire. We had dined an hour previously at the Grand Hotel as guests of Carswell, and, having taken our coffee at my house, were remaining outdoors on the gallery "for a breath of air" on a rather warm and sultry February evening. We were sitting, quietly talking in a rather desultory manner, all of us unspokenly reluctant to move inside the house for a projected evening at contract.

It was, as I recall the hour, about nine o'clock, the night warm, as I have said, and very still. Above, in a cloudless sky of luminous indigo, the tropical stars glowed enormous. The intoxicating sweet odors of white jessamine and tuberose made the still air redolent. No sound, except an occasional rather languid remark from one of ourselves, broke the exquisite, balmy stillness.

Then, all at once, without any warning and with an abruptness which caused Carswell and me to stand up, the exquisite perfection of the night was rudely shattered by an appalling, sustained scream of sheer mortal terror.

**T**HAT scream inaugurated what seems to me as I look back upon the next few days, to be one of the most unnerving, devastating, and generally horrible periods I can recall in a lifetime not devoid of adventure. I formulated at that time, and still retain, mentally, a phrase descriptive of it. It was "The Reign of Terror."

Carswell and I, following the direction of the scream, rushed down

the outer gallery steps and back through the yard towards the negro-cabins. As I have mentioned, only one of these was occupied, Brutus Hellman's. As we rounded the corner of the house a faint light—it was Brutus' oil lamp—appeared in the form of a wide vertical strip at the entrance of the occupied cabin. To that we ran as to a beacon, and pushed into the room.

The lamp, newly lighted, and smoking, its glass chimney set on askew as though in great haste, dimly illuminated a strange scene. Dounded up and sitting on the side of his bed, the bedclothes near the bed's foot lumped together where he had flung them, cowered Brutus. His face was a dull, ashen gray in the smoky light, his back was hent, his hands clasped tightly about his shin. And, from between those clenched hands, a steady stream of blood stained the white sheet which hung over the bed's edge and spread below into a small pool on the cabin room's stone-paved floor.

Brutus, groaning dismally, rocked back and forth, clutching his leg. The lamp smoked steadily, defiling the close air, while, incongruously, through the now open doorway poured streams and great pulsing breaths of night-blooming tropical flowers, mingling strangely with the hot, acrid odor of the smoking lamp-wick.

CARSWELL went directly to the lamp, straightened the chimney, turned down the flame. The lamp ceased its ugly reek and the air of the cabin cleared as Carswell, turning away from the lamp, threw wide the shutters of the large window which, like most West Indian Negroes, Brutus had closed against the "night air" when he retired.

I gave my attention directly to the man, and by the time the air had cleared somewhat I had him over on his back in a reclining position, and

with a great strip torn from one of his bedsheets, was binding up the ugly deep little wound in the lower muscle of his leg just at the outside of the shin-bone. I pulled the improvised bandage tight, and the flow of blood ceased, and Brutus, his mind probably somewhat relieved by this timely aid, put an end to his moaning, and turned his ashy face up to mine.

"Did you see it, sar?" he inquired, biting back the trembling of his mouth.

I paid practically no attention to this remark. Indeed, I barely heard it. I was, you see, very husily engaged in staunching the flow of blood. Brutus had already lost a considerable quantity, and my rough bandaging was directed entirely to the end of stopping this. Instead of replying to Brutus' question I turned to Carswell, who had finished with the lamp and the window, and now stood by, ready to lend a hand in his efficient way.

"Run up to the bathroom, will you, Carswell, and bring me a couple of rolls of bandage, from the medicine closet, and a bottle of mercurochrome." Carswell disappeared on this errand and I sat, holding my hands tightly around Brutus' leg, just above the handage. Then he repeated his question, and this time I paid attention to what he was saying.

"SEE what, Brutus?" I inquired, and looked at him, almost for the first time—into his eyes, I mean. Hitherto I had been looking at my bandaging.

I saw a stark terror in those eyes.

"It," said Brutus; "de T'ing, sar."

I sat on the side of the bed and looked at him. I was, naturally, puzzled.

"What thing, Brutus?" I asked, very quietly, almost soothingly. Such terror possessed my second house-man that, I considered, he

must, for the time being, be treated like a frightened child.

"De T'ing what attack me, sar," explained Brutus.

"What was it like?" I countered. "Do you mean it is still here—in your rooms?"

At that Brutus very nearly collapsed. His eyes rolled up and their irises nearly disappeared; he shuddered as though with a violent chill, from head to foot. I let go his leg. The blood would be no longer flowing, I felt sure, under that tight bandaging of mine. I turned back the bedclothes, rolled poor Brutus under, them, tucked him in. I took his limp hands and rubbed them smartly. At this instant Carswell came in through the still open doorway, his hands full of first-aid material. This he laid without a word on the bed beside me, and stood, looking at Brutus, slightly shaking his head. I turned to him.

"And would you mind bringing some brandy, old man? He's rather down and out, I'm afraid—trembling from head to foot."

"It's the reaction, of course," remarked Carswell quietly. "I have the brandy here." The efficient fellow drew a small flask from his jacket pocket, uncorked it, and poured out a dose in the small silver cup which covered the patent stopper.

I RAISED Brutus' head from the pillow, his teeth audibly chattering as I did so, and just as I was getting the brandy between his lips, there came a slight scuttering sound from under the bed, and something, a small, dark, sinister-looking animal of about the size of a mongoose, dashed on all fours across the open space between the bed's corner and the still open doorway and disappeared into the night outside. Without a word Carswell ran after it, turning sharply to the left and running past the open window. I dropped the empty brandy cup, low-

ered Brutus' head hastily to its pillow, and dashed out of the cabin. Carswell was at the end of the cabins, his flashlight stabbing the narrow alleyway where I had found the miniature African hut. I ran up to him.

"It went up here," said Carswell laconically.

I stood beside him in silence, my hand on his shoulder. He brightened every nook and cranny of the narrow alleyway with his light. There was nothing, nothing alive, to be seen. The Thing had had, of course, ample time to turn some hidden corner behind the cabins, to bury itself out of sight in some accustomed hiding-place, even to climb over the high, rough-surfaced back wall. Carswell brought his flashlight to rest finally on the little hut-like thing which still stood in the alleyway.

"What's that?" he inquired. "Looks like some child's toy."

"That's what I supposed when I discovered it," I answered. "I imagine it belongs to the washer's pickaninny." We stepped into the alleyway. It was not quite wide enough for us to walk abreast. Carswell followed me in. I turned over the little hut with my foot. There was nothing under it. I daresay the possibility of this as a cache for the Thing had occurred to Carswell and me simultaneously. That, however, settled it. The Thing, mongoose, or whatever it was, had got clean away.

WE returned to the cabin and found Brutus recovering from his ague-like trembling fit. His eyes were calmer now. The reassurance of our presence, the bandaging, had had their effect. Brutus proceeded to thank us for what we had done for him.

Helped by Carswell, I gingerly removed my rough bandage. The blood about that ugly bite—for a bite it certainly was, with unmistakable tooth-marks around its badly torn edges—was clotted now. The flow



had ceased. We poured mereurochrome over and through the wound, disinfecting it, and then I placed two entire rolls of three-inch bandage about Brutus' wounded ankle. Then, with various encouragements and reassurances, we left him, the lamp still burning at his request, and went back to the ladies.

Our contract game was, somehow, a jumpy one, the ladies having been considerably upset by the scare down there in the yard, and we concluded it early, Carswell driving Mrs. Spencer home and I walking down the hill with Mrs. Squire to the Grand Hotel where she was spending that winter.

It was still several minutes short of midnight when I returned, after a slow walk up the hill, to my house. I had been thinking of the incident all the way up the hill. I determined to look in upon Brutus Hellman before retiring, but first I went up to my bedroom and loaded a small automatic pistol, and this I carried with me when I went down to the cabins in the yard. Brutus' light was still going, and he was awake, for he responded instantly to my tap on his door.

**I** WENT in and talked with the man for a few minutes. I left him the gun, which he placed carefully under his pillow. At the door I turned and addressed him:

"How do you suppose the thing—whatever it was that attacked you, Brutus—could have got in, with everything closed up tight?"

Brutus replied that he had been thinking of this himself and had come to the conclusion that "de T'ing" had concealed itself in the cabin before he had retired and closed the window and door. He expressed himself as uneasy with the window open, as Carswell and I had left it.

"But, man, you should have the fresh air while you sleep. You don't want your place closed up like a

field-laborer's, do you?" said I, rallying. Brutus grinned.

"No, sar," said he, slowly, "'aint dat I be afeared of de Jumbee! I daresay it born in de blood, sar. I is close up everyt'ing by instinct! Besides, sar, now dat de T'ing attack-in' me, p'raps bes' to have the window close up tightly. Den de T'ing cyant possibly mek an entrance 'pon me!"

I assured Brutus that the most agile mongoose could hardly clamber up that smooth, whitewashed wall outside and come in that window. Brutus smiled, but shook his head nevertheless.

"Taint a mongoose, nor a rat, neither, sar," he remarked, as he settled himself for rest under the bedclothes.

"What do you think it is, then?" I inquired.

"Only de good Gawd know, sar," replied Brutus cryptically.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Second Attack*

**I** WAS perhaps half-way across the house-yard on my way to turn in when my ears were assailed by precisely one of those snpressed combinations of squeals and grunts which John Masefield describes as presaging an animal tragedy under the hedge of an English countryside on a moonlit summer night. Something—a brief, ruthless combat for food or blood, between two small ground animals—was going on somewhere in the vicinity. I paused, listened, my senses the more readily attuned to this bitter duel because of what had happened in Brutus' cabin. As I paused, the squeals of the fighting animals abruptly ceased. One combatant, apparently, had given up the ghost! A grunting noise persisted for a few instants, however, and it made me shudder involuntarily. These sounds were low, essentially bestial, commonplace. Yet there was

in them something so savage, albeit on the small scale of our everyday West Indian fauna, as to give me pause. I could feel the beginning of a cold shudder run down my spine under my white drill jacket!

I turned about, almost reluctantly, drawn somehow, in spite of myself, to the scene of combat. The grunts had ceased now, and to my ears, in the quiet of that perfect night of soft airs and moonlight, there came the even more horrible little sound of the tearing of flesh! It was gruesome, quite horrible, well-nigh unbearable. I paused again, a little shaken, it must be confessed, my nerves a trifle unstrung. I was facing in the direction of the ripping sounds now. Then there was silence—complete, tranquil, absolute!

THEN I stepped towards the scene of this small conflict, my flashlight sweeping that corner of the yard nearest the small alleyway.

It picked up the victim almost at once, and I thought—I could not be quite sure—that I saw at the very edge of the circle of illumination, the scrambling flight of the victor. The victim was commonplace. It was the body, still slightly palpitating, of a large, well-nourished rat. The dead rat lay well out in the yard, its freshly drawn vital fluid staining a wide smear on the flagstone which supported it—a ghastly-looking affair. I looked down at it curiously. It had, indeed, been a ruthless attack to which this lowly creature had succumbed. Its throat was torn out, it was disembowelled, riven terrifically. I stepped back to Brutus' cabin, went in, and picked up from a pile of them on his bureau a copy of one of our small-sheet local newspapers. With this, nodding smilingly at Brutus I proceeded once more to the scene of carnage. I had an idea. I laid the paper down, kicked the body of the rat upon it with my foot, and, picking up the paper, carried the dead

rat into Brutus' cabin. I turned up his lamp and carried it over to the bedside.

"Do you suppose this was your animal, Brutus?" I asked. "If so, you seem to be pretty well avenged!"

Brutus grinned and looked closely at the riven animal. Then:

"No, sar," he said, slowly, "'Twas no rat whut attacked me, sar. See de t'roat, please, sar. Him ahl tore out, mos' effectively! No, sar. But—I surmise—from de appearance of dis t'roat, de mouf which maim me on de laig was de same mouf whut completely ruin dis rat!"

And, indeed, judging from the appearance of the rat Brutus' judgment might well be sound.

I wrapped the paper about it, said good night once more to Hellman, carried it out with me, threw it into the metal waste-basket in which the house-trash is hurned every morning, and went to bed.

AT three minutes past four the next morning I was snatched out of my comfortable bed and a deep sleep by the rattle of successive shots from the wicked little automatic I had left with Brutus. I jumped into my bathrobe, thrust my feet into my slippers, and was downstairs on the run, almost before the remnants of sleep were out of my eyes and brain. I ran out through the kitchen, as the nearest way, and was inside Brutus' cabin before the empty pistol, still clutched in his hand and pointed towards the open window, had ceased amoking. My first words were:

"Did you get It, Brutus?" I was thinking of the thing in terms of "It."

Yes, sar," returned Brutus, lowering his pistol. "I t'ink I scotch him, sar. Be please to look on de window-sill. P'raps some blood in evidence, sar."

I did so, and found that Brutus' marksmanship was better than I had

anticipated when I entrusted him with the gun. To be sure, he had fired off all seven bullets, and, apparently, scored only one hit. A small, single drop of fresh blood lay on the white-painted wooden window-sill. No other trace of the attacker was in evidence. My flashlight revealed no marks, and the smooth, freshly-whitewashed wall outside was unscathed. Unless the Thing had wings—something suddenly touched me on the forehead, something light and delicate. I reached up, grasping. My hand closed around something like a string. I turned the flashlight up and there hung a thin strand of liana stem. I pulled it. It was firmly fastened somewhere up above there. I stepped outside, with one of Brutus' chairs, placed this against the outer wall under the window, and, standing on it, raked the eaves with the flashlight. The upper end of the liana stem was looped about a small projection in the gutter, just above the window.

The Thing, apparently, knew enough to resort to this mechanical method for its second attack that night.

Inside, Brutus, somewhat excited over his exploit, found a certain difficulty in describing just what it was that had drawn his aim.

"It hav de appearance of a frog, sar," he vouchsafed. "I is wide awake when de T'ing land himself 'pon de sill, an' I hav opportunity for takin' an excellent aim, sar." That was the best I could get out of Brutus. I tried to visualize a "Thing" which looked like a frog, being able to master one of our big, ferocious rats and tear out its inner parts and go off with them, not to mention liana stems with loop-knots in them to swing from a roof to an open window, and which could make a wound like the one above Brutus Hellman's ankle. It was rather too much for me. But—the Reign of Terror had begun, and no mistake!

## CHAPTER V

### *Science Takes a Hand*

**R**UNNING over this summary in my mind as I stood and listened to Brutus telling about his marksmanship, it occurred to me, in a somewhat fantastic light, I must admit—the idea of calling in "science" to our aid, forming the fantastic element—that the Thing had left a clue which might well be unmistakable; something which, suitably managed, might easily clear up the mounting mystery.

I went back to the house, broached my medicine closet, and returned to the cabin with a pair of glass microscopic slides. Between these I made a smear of the still fresh and fluid blood on the window-sill, and went back to my room, intending to send the smear later in the morning to Dr. Pelletier's laboratory-man at the Municipal Hospital.

I left the slides there myself, requesting Dr. Brownell to make me an analysis of the specimen with a view to determining its place in the gamut of West Indian fauna, and that afternoon, shortly after the siesta hour, I received a telephone call from the young physician. Dr. Brownell had a certain whimsical cast apparent in his voice which was new to me. He spoke, I thought, rather banteringly.

"Where did you get your specimen, Mr. Canevin?" he inquired. "I understood you to say it was the blood of some kind of lower animal."

"Yes," said I, "That was what I understood, Dr. Brownell. Is there something peculiar about it?"

"Well—" said Dr. Brownell slowly, and somewhat banteringly, "yes—and no. The only queer thing about it is that it's—human blood, probably a Negro's."

I managed to thank him, even to say that I did not want the specimen returned, in answer to his query, and we rang off.

The plot, it seemed to me, was, in

the language of the tradition of strange occurrences, thickening! This, then, must be Brutus' blood. Brutus' statement, that he had shot at and struck the marauder at his open window, must be imagination—Negro talk! But, even allowing that it was Brutus' blood—there was, certainly, no one else about to supply that drop of fresh fluid which I had so carefully scraped up on my two glass slides—how had he got blood, from his wounded lower leg, presumably, on that high window-sill? To what end would the man lie to me on such a subject? Besides, certainly he had shot at something—the pistol was smoking when I got to his room. And then—the liana stem? How was that to be accounted for?

Dr. Brownell's report made the whole thing more complicated than it had been before. Science, which I had so cheerfully invoked, had only served to make this mystery deeper and more inexplicable.

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Third Attack*

**H**ANDICAPPED by nothing more than a slight limp Brutus Hellman was up and attending to his duties about the house the next day. In response to my careful questioning, he had repeated the story of his shooting in all particulars just as he had recounted that incident to me in the gray hours of the early morning. He had even added a particular which fitted in with the liana stem as the means of ingress. The Thing, he said, had appeared to *swing down* onto the window-sill from above, as he, awake for the time being between cat-naps, had first seen it and reached for the pistol underneath his pillow and then opened fire.

Nothing happened throughout the day; nor, indeed, during the Reign of Terror as I have called it, did anything untoward occur throughout, except at night. That evening,

shortly after eight o'clock, Brutus retired, and Stephen Penn, who had accompanied him to his cabin, reported to me that, in accordance with my suggestion, the two of them had made an exhaustive search for any concealed "Thing" which might have secreted itself about Brutus' premises. They had found nothing, and Brutus, his window open, but provided with a tight-fitting screen which had been installed during the day, had fallen asleep before Stephen left. Penn had carefully closed the cabin door behind him, making sure that it was properly latched.

The attack that night—I had been sleeping "with one eye open"—did not come until two o'clock in the morning. This time Brutus had no opportunity to use the gun, and so I was not awakened until it was all over. It was, indeed, Brutus calling me softly from the yard at a quarter past two that brought me to my feet and to the window.

"Yes," said I, "what is it, Brutus?"

"You axed me to inform you, sar, of anything," explained Brutus from the yard.

"Right! What happened? Wait, Brutus, I'll come down," and I hurriedly stepped into bathrobe and slippers.

**B**RUTUS was waiting for me at the kitchen door, a hand to his left cheek, holding a handkerchief rolled into a ball. Even in the moonlight I could see that this makeshift dressing was bright red. Brutus, it appeared, had suffered another attack of some kind. I took him into the house and upstairs, and dressed the three wounds in his left cheek in my bathroom. He had been awakened without warning, fifteen minutes before, with a sudden hurt, had straightened up in bed, but not before two more stabs, directly through the cheek, had been delivered. He had only just seen the Thing scrambling down over the foot of the bed,

as he came awake under the impetus of these stabs, and, after a hasty search for the attacker had wisely devoted himself to staunching his bleeding face. Then, trembling in every limb, he had stepped out into the yard and come under my window to call me.

The three holes through the man's cheek were of equal size and similar appearance, obviously inflicted by some stabbing implement of about the diameter of a quarter-inch. The first stab, Brutus thought, had been the one highest up, and this one had not only penetrated into the mouth like the others, but had severely scratched the gum of the upper jaw just above his eye-tooth. I talked to him as I dressed these three wounds. "So the thing must have been concealed inside your room, you think, Brutus?"

"Undoubtedly, sar," returned Brutus. "There was no possible way for it to crawl in 'pon me—de door shut tight, he window-screen undisturb', sar."

The poor fellow was trembling from head to foot with shock and fear, and I accompanied him back to his cabin. He had not lighted his lamp. It was only by the light of the moon that he had seen his assailant disappear over the foot of the bed. He had seized the handkerchief and run out into the yard in his pajamas.

I lit the lamp, determining to have electricity put into the cabin the next day, and, with Brutus' assistance, looked carefully over the room. Nothing, apparently, was hidden anywhere; there was only a little space to search through; Brutus had few belongings; the cabin furniture was adequate but scanty. There were no superfluities, no place, in other words, in which the Thing could hide itself.

Whatever had attacked Brutus was indeed going about its work with vicious cunning and determination.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Fourth Attack*

BRUTUS turned in, and after sitting beside him for a while, I left the lamp turned down, closed the door, and took my departure.

Brutus did not turn up in the morning, and Stephen Penn, returning from an investigatory visit to the cabin came to me on the gallery about nine o'clock with a face as gray as ashes. He had found Brutus unconscious, the head soaked in blood, and, along the great pectoral muscle where the right arm joins the body, a long and deep gash from which the unfortunate fellow had, apparently, lost literally quarts of blood. I telephoned for a doctor and hurried to the cabin.

Brutus was conscious upon my arrival, but so weakened from loss of blood as to be quite unable to speak. On the floor, beside the bed, apparently where it had fallen, lay a medium-sized pocket knife, its largest blade open, soaked in blood. Apparently this had been the instrument with which he had been wounded.

The doctor, soon after his arrival, declared a blood-transfusion to be necessary, and this operation was performed at eleven o'clock in the cabin, Stephen contributing a portion of the blood, a young Negro from the town, paid for his service, the rest. After that, and the administration of a nourishing hot drink, Brutus was able to tell us what had happened.

Against his own expectations, he had fallen asleep immediately after my departure, and, curiously, had been awakened not by any attack upon him, but by the booming of a *rata* drum from somewhere up in the hills back of the town where some of the Negroes were, doubtless, "making magic," a common enough occurrence in any of the vodu-ridden West India islands. But this, according to

Brutus, was no ordinary awakening.

No—for, on the floor, beside his bed, *dancing to the distant drum-beats*, he had seen—It!

**T**HAT Brutus had possessed some idea of the identity or character of his assailant, I had, previous to this occurrence of his most serious wound, strongly suspected. I had gathered this impression from half a dozen little things, such as his fervid denial that the creature which had bitten him was either a rat or a mongoose; his "Gawd know" when I had asked him what the Thing was like.

Now I understood, clearly of course, that Brutue knew what kind of creature had concealed itself in his room. I even elicited the fact, discovered by him, just how I am quite unaware, that the Thing had hidden under a loose floor board beneath his bed and so escaped detection on the several previous searches.

But to find out from Brutus—the only person who knew—that, indeed, was quite another affair. There can be, I surmise, no human being as consistently and completely shut-mouthed as a West Indian Negro, once such a person has definitely made up his mind to silence on a given subject! And on this subject, Brutus had, it appeared, quite definitely made up his mind. No questions, no cajolery, no urging—even with tears, on the part of his lifelong friend Stephen Penn—could elicit from him the slightest remark bearing on the description or identity of the Thing. I myself used every argument which logic and common-sense presented to my Caucasian mind. I urged his subsequent safety upon Brutus, my earnest desire to protect him, the logical necessity of cooperating, in the stubborn fellow's own obvious interest, with us who had his safety and welfare at heart. Stephen, as I have said, even wept! But all these efforts on our parts, were of no

avail. Brutue Hellman resolutely refused to add a single word to what he had already said. He had awakened to the muted booming of the distant drum. He had seen the Thing dancing beside his bed. He had, it appeared, fainted from this shock, whatever the precise nature of that shock may have been, and knew nothing more until he came slowly to a vastly weakened consciousness between Stephen Penn's visit to him late in the morning, and mine which followed it almost at once.

**T**HERE was one fortunate circumstance. The deep and wide cut which had, apparently, been inflicted upon him with his own pocket-knife—it had been lying, open, by mere chance, on a small tabouret beside his bed—had been delivered lengthwise of the pectoral muscle, not across that muscle. Otherwise the fellow's right arm would have been seriously crippled for life. The major damage he had suffered in this last and most serious attack had been the loss of blood, and this, through my employment of one donor of blood and Stephen Penn's devotion in giving him the remainder, had been virtually repaired.

However, whether he spoke or kept silent, it was plain to me that I had a very definite duty towards Brutus Hellman. I could not, if anything were to be done to prevent it, have him attacked in this way while in my service and living on my premises.

The electricity went in that afternoon, with a pull-switch placed near the hand of whoever slept in the bed, and, later in the day, Stephen Penn brought up on a donkey cart from his town lodging-place, his own bedstead, which he set up in Brutus' room, and his bureau containing the major portion of his belongings, which he placed in the newly-swept and garnished cabin next door. If the Thing repeated its attack that

night, it would have Stephen, as well as Brutus, to deal with.

One contribution to our knowledge Stephen made, even before he had actually moved into my yard. This was the instrument with which Brutus had been stabbed through the cheek. He found it cached in the floor-space underneath that loose board where the Thing had bidden itself. He brought it to me, covered with dried blood. It was a rough, small-scale reproduction of an African "assegai," or stabbing-spear. It was made out of an ordinary butcher's hardwood meat-skewer, its head a splinter of pointed glass such as might be picked up anywhere about the town. The head—and this was what caused the resemblance to an assegai—was very exactly and neatly bound on to the cleft end of the skewer, with fishline. On the whole, and considered as a piece of work, the "assegai" was a highly creditable job.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Science Is Again Invoked*

IT was on the morning of this last-recorded attack on Brutus Hellman during the period between my visit to him and the arrival of the doctor with the man for the blood-transfusion, that I sat down, at my desk, in an attempt to figure out some conclusion from the facts already known. I had progressed somewhat with my theoretical investigation at that time. When later, after Brutus could talk, he mentioned the circumstance of the Thing's dancing there on his cabin floor, to the notes of a drum, in the pouring moonlight which came through his screened window and gave its illumination to the little room, I came to some sort of indeterminate decision. I will recount the steps—they are very brief—which led up to this.

The facts, as I noted them down on paper that day, pointed to a pair of

alternatives. Either Brutus Hellman was demented, and had invented his "attacks," having inflicted them upon himself for some inscrutable reason; or—the Thing was possessed of qualities not common among the lower animals! I set the two groups of facts side by side, and compared them.

Carswell and I had actually seen the Thing as it ran out of the cabin that first night. Something, presumably the same Thing, had torn a large rat to pieces. The same Thing had bitten savagely Brutus' lower leg. Brutus' description of it was that it looked "like a frog." Those four facts seemed to indicate one of the lower animals, though its genus and the motive for its attacks were unknown!

On the other hand, there was a divergent set of facts. The Thing had used mechanical means, a liana stem with a looped knot in it, to get into Brutus' cabin through the window. It had used some stabbing instrument, later found, and proving to be a manufactured affair. Again, later, it had used Brutus' knife in its final attack. All these facts pointed to some such animal as a small monkey. This theory was strengthened by the shape of the bites on Brutus' leg and on the rat's throat.

That it was not a monkey, however, there was excellent evidence. The Thing looked like a frog. A frog is a very different-looking creature from any known kind of monkey. There were, so far as I knew, no monkeys at the time on the island of St. Thomas.

I ADDED to these sets of facts two other matters: The blood alleged to be drawn from the Thing had, on analysis, turned out to be human blood. The single circumstance pointed very strongly to the insanity theory. On the other hand, Brutus could hardly have placed the fresh blood which I had myself

scraped up on my slides, on the window-sill where I found it. Still, he might have done so, if his "insanity" were such as to allow for an elaborately "planted" hoax or something of the kind. He could have placed the drop of blood there, drawn from his own body by means of a pin-prick, before he fired the seven cartridges that night. It was possible. But, knowing Brutus, it was so improbable as to be quite absurd.

The final circumstance was the little "African" hut. That, somehow, seemed to fit in with the "asaagai." The two naturally went together.

It was a jumble, a puzzle. The more I contrasted and compared these clues, the more impossible the situation became.

Well, there was one door open, at least. I decided to go through that door and see where it led me. I sent for Stephen. It was several hours after the blood-transfusion. I had to get some of Brutus' blood for my experiment, but it must be blood drawn previous to the transfusion. Stephen came to see what I wanted.

"Stephen," said I, "I want you to secure from Hellman's soiled things one of those very bloody sheets which you changed on his bed to-day, and bring it here."

Stephen goggled at me, but went at once on this extraordinary errand. He brought me the sheet. On one of its corners, there was an especially heavy mass of clotted blood. From the underside of this I managed to secure a fresh enough smear on a pair of glass slides, and with these I stepped into my car and ran down to the hospital and asked for Dr. Brownell.

I gave him the slides and asked him to make for me an analysis for the purpose of comparing this blood with the specimen I had given him two days before. My only worry was whether or not they had kept a record of the former analysis, it being a private job and not part of the hospi-

tal routine. They had recorded it, however, and Dr. Brownell obligingly made the test for me then and there. Half an hour after he had stepped into the laboratory he came back to me.

"Here are the records," he said. "The two specimens are unquestionably from the same person, presumably a Negro. They are virtually identical."

**T**HE blood alleged to be the Thing's, then, was merely Brutus' blood. The strong presumption was, therefore, that Brutus had lost his mind.

Into this necessary conclusion, I attempted to fit the remaining facts. Unfortunately for the sake of any solution, they did not fit! Brutus might, for some insane reason, have inflicted the three sets of wounds upon himself. But Brutus had not made the "African" hut, which had turned up before he was back from the hospital. He had not, presumably, fastened that liana stem outside his window. He had not, certainly, slain that rat, nor could he have "invented" the creature which both Carswell and I had seen, however vaguely, running out of his cabin that night of the first attack.

At the end of all my cogitations, I knew absolutely nothing, except what my own senses had conveyed to me; and these discordant facts I have already set down in their order and sequence, precisely and accurately, as they occurred.

To these I now add the additional fact that upon the night following the last recorded attack on Brutus Hellman, nothing whatever happened. Neither he nor Stephen Penn, sleeping side by side in their two beds in the cabin room, were in any way disturbed.

I wished, fervently, that Dr. Peller were at hand. I needed someone like him to talk to. Carswell would not answer, somehow. No one would



answer. I needed Pelletier, with his incisive mind, his scientific training, his vast knowledge of the West Indies, his open-mindedness to facts wherever these and their contemplation might lead the investigator. I needed Pelletier very badly indeed!

And Pelletier was still over in Porto Rico.

Only one further circumstance, and that, apparently, an irrelevant one, can be added to the facts already narrated—those incongruous facts which did not appear to have any reasonable connection with one another and seemed to be mystifyingly contradictory. The circumstance was related to me by Stephen Penn, and it was nothing more or less than the record of a word, a proper name. This, Stephen alleged, Brutus had repeated, over and over, as, under the effects of the two degrees of temperature which he was carrying as the result of his shock and of the blood-transfusion, he had tossed about restlessly during a portion of the night. That name was, in a sense, a singularly appropriate one for Brutus to utter, even though one would hardly suspect the fellow of having any acquaintance with Roman history, or, indeed, with the works of William Shakespeare!

The name was—Cassius!

I figured that anyone bearing the Christian name, Brutus, must, in the course of a lifetime, have got wind of the original Brutus' side-partner. The two names naturally go together, of course, like Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan! However, I said nothing about this to Brutus.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Dr. Pelletier Returns*

**I** WAS on the concrete wharf beside the Naval Administration Building long before the *Grebe* arrived from San Juan on the Thursday morning a week after Brutus Hellman's operation.

I wanted to get Pelletier's ear at the earliest possible moment. Nearby, in the waiting line against the wall of the Navy building, Stephen Penn at the wheel, stood my car. I had telephoned Pelletier's man that he need not meet the doctor. I was going to do that myself, to get what facts, whatever explanation Pelletier might have to offer as I drove him through the town and up the precipitous roadways of Denmark Hill to his house at its summit.

My hulky, hard-bolled, genial, naval surgeon friend, of the keen, analytical brain and the skilful hands which so often skirted the very edges of death in his operating-room, was unable, however, to accompany me at once upon his arrival. I had to wait more than twenty minutes for him, while others, who had prior claims upon him, interviewed him. At last he broke away from the importunate ones and heaved his unwieldy bulk into the back seat of my car beside me. Among those who had waylaid him, I recognized Doctors Roots and Maguire, both naval surgeons.

I had not finished my account of the persecution to which Brutus Hellman had been subjected by the time we arrived at the doctor's hill-top abode. I told Stephen to wait for me and finished the story inside the house while Pelletier's houseman was unpacking his traveling valises. Pelletier heard me through in virtual silence, only occasionally interrupting with a pertinent question. When I had finished he lay back in his chair, his eyes closed.

**H**E said nothing for several minutes. Then, his eyes still shut, he raised and slightly waved his big, awkward-looking hand, that hand of such uncanny skill when it held a knife, and began to speak, very slowly and reflectively:

"Dr. Roots mentioned a peculiar circumstance on the wharf."

"Yes?" said I.

"Yes," said Dr. Pelletier. He shifted his ungainly bulk in his big chair, opened his eyes and looked at me. Then, very deliberately:

"Roots reported the disappearance of the thing—it was a parasitic growth—that I removed from your house-man's side a week ago. When they had dressed the fellow and sent him back to the ward Roots intended to look the thing over in the laboratory. It was quite unusual. I'll come to that in a minute. But when he turned to pick it up, it was gone; had quite disappeared. The nurse, Miss Charles, and he looked all over for it, made a very thorough search. That was one of the things he came down for this morning—to report that to me." Once again Pelletier paused, looked at me searchingly, as though studying me carefully. Then he said:

"I understood you to say that the Thing, as you call it, is still at large?"

The incredible possible implication of this statement of the disappearance of the "growth" removed from Hellman's body and the doctor's question, stunned me for an instant. Could he possibly mean to imply—? I stared at him, blankly, for an instant.

"Yes," said I, "it is still at large, and poor Hellman is barricaded in his cabin. As I have told you, I have dressed those bites and gashes myself. He absolutely refuses to go to the hospital again. He lies there, muttering to himself, ash-gray with fear."

"Hm," vouchsafed Dr. Pelletier. "How big would you say the Thing is, Canevin, judging from your glimpse of it and the marks it leaves?"

"About the size, say, of a rat," I answered, "and black. We had that one sight of it, that first night. Carswell and I both saw it scuttering out of Hellman's cabin right under our feet when this horrible business first started."

Dr. Pelletier nodded, slowly. Then he made another remark, apparently irrelevant:

"I had breakfast this morning on board the *Grebe*. Could you give me lunch?" He looked at his watch.

"Of course," I returned. "Are you thinking of—"

"Let's get going," said Dr. Pelletier, heaving himself to his feet.

WE started at once, the doctor calling out to his servants that he would not be back for one o'clock "breakfast," and Stephen Penn who had driven us up the hill drove us down again. Arrived at my house we proceeded straight to Hellman's cabin. Dr. Pelletier talked soothingly to the poor fellow while examining those ugly wounds. On several he placed fresh dressings from his professional black bag. When he had finished he drew me outside.

"You did well, Canevin," he remarked, reflectively, "in not calling in anybody, dressing those wounds yourself! What people don't know, er—won't hurt 'em!"

He paused after a few steps away from the cabin.

"Show me," he commanded, "which way the Thing ran, that first night."

I indicated the direction, and we walked along the line of it, Pelletier forging ahead, his black bag in his big hand. We reached the corner of the cabin in a few steps, and Pelletier glanced up the alleyway between the cabin's side and the high yard-wall. The little toy house, looking somewhat dilapidated now, still stood where it had been, since I first discovered it. Pelletier did not enter the alleyway. He looked in at the queer little miniature hut.

"Hm," he remarked, his forehead puckered into a thick frowning wrinkle. Then, turning abruptly to me:

"I suppose it must have occurred to you that the Thing lived in that," said he, challengingly.

"Yes—naturally; after it went for my fingers—whatever that creature may have been. Three or four times I've gone in there with a flashlight after one of the attacks on Brutus Hellman; picked it up, even, and looked inside—"

"And the Thing is never there," finished Dr. Pelletier, nodding sagaciously.

"Never," I corroborated.

"Come on up to the gallery," said the doctor, "and I'll tell you what I think."

## CHAPTER X

### *Dr. Pelletier's Theory*

WE proceeded to the gallery at once and Dr. Pelletier, laying down his black bag, caused a lounge-chair to groan and creak beneath his recumbent weight while I went into the house to command the usual West Indian preliminary to a meal.

A few minutes later Dr. Pelletier told me what he thought, according to his promise. His opening remark was in the form of a question; about the very last question anyone in his senses would have regarded as pertinent to the subject in hand.

"Do you know anything about twins, Canevin?" he inquired.

"Twins?" said I. "Twins!" I was greatly puzzled. I had not been expecting any remarks about twins.

"Well," said I, as Dr. Pelletier stared at me gravely, "only what everybody knows about them, I imagine. What about them?"

"There are two types of twins, Canevin—and I don't mean the difference arising out of being separate or attached-at-birth, the 'Siamese' or ordinary types. I mean something far more basic than that accidental division into categories; more fundamental—deeper than that kind of distinction. The two kinds of twins I have reference to are called in biological terminology 'monozygotic' and 'dizygotic,' respectively; those

which originate, that is, from one cell, or from two."

"The distinction," I threw in, "which Johannes Lange makes in his study of criminal determinism, his book, 'Crime and Destiny.' The one-cell-originated twins, he contends, have identical motives and personalities. If one is a thief, the other has to be! He sets out to prove—and that pompous ass, Haldane, who wrote the foreword, believes it, too—that there is no free-will; that man's moral course is predetermined, inescapable—a kind of scientific Calvinism."

"Precisely, just that," said Dr. Pelletier. "Anyhow, you understand that distinction." I looked at him, still somewhat puzzled.

"YES," said I, "but still, I don't see its application to this nasty business of Brutus Hellman."

"I was leading up to telling you," said Dr. Pelletier, in his matter-of-fact, forthright fashion of speech; "to telling you, Canevin, that the Thing is, undoubtedly, the parasitic, 'Siamese-twin' that I cut away from Brutus Hellman last Thursday morning, and which disappeared out of the operating-room. Also, from the evidence, I'd be inclined to think it is of the 'dizygotic' type. That would not occur, in the case of 'attached' twins, more than once in ten million times!"

He panned at this and looked at me. For my part, after that amazing, that utterly incredible statement; so calmly made, so dispassionately uttered, I could do nothing but sit limply in my chair and gaze woodenly at my guest. I was so astounded that I was incapable of uttering a word. But I did not have to say anything. Dr. Pelletier was speaking again, developing his thesis.

"Put together the known facts, Canevin. It is the scientific method, the only satisfactory method, when you are confronted with a situation

like this one. You can do so quite easily, almost at random, here. To begin with, you never found the Thing in that little thatched hut after one of its attacks—did you?"

"No," I managed to murmur, out of a strangely dry mouth. Pelletier's theory held me stupefied by its unexpectedness, its utter, weird strangeness. The name, "Cassius," smote my brain. That identical blood—

"If the Thing had been, say, a rat," he continued, "as you supposed when it went for your fingers, it would have gone straight from its attacks on Brutus Hellman to its diggings—the refuge-instinct; 'holing-up.' But it didn't. You investigated several times and it wasn't inside the little house, although it ran towards it, as you believed, after seeing it start that way the first night; although the creature that went for your hand was there, inside, *before it suspected pursuit*. You see? That gives us a lead, a clue. The Thing possesses a much higher level of intelligence than that of a mere rodent. Do you grasp that significant point, Canevin? The Thing, anticipating pursuit, avoided capture by instinctively outguessing the pursuer. It went towards its diggings but deferred entrance until the pursuer had investigated and gone away. Do you get it?"

I NODDED, not desiring to interrupt. I was following Pelletier's thesis eagerly now. He resumed:

"Next—consider those wounds, those bites, on Brutus Hellman. They were never made by any small, ground-dwelling animal, a rodent, like a rat or a mongoose. No; those teeth-marks are those of—well, say, a marmoset or any very small monkey; or, Canevin, of *an unbelievably small human being!*"

Pelletier and I sat and looked at each other. I think that, after an appreciable interval, I was able to nod

my head in his direction. Pelletier continued:

"The next point we come to—before going on to something a great deal deeper, Canevin—is the color of the Thing. You saw it. It was only a momentary glimpse, as you say, but you secured enough of an impression to seem pretty positive on that question of its color. Didn't you?"

"Yes," said I, slowly. "It was as black as a derby hat, Pelletier."

"There you have one point definitely settled, then." The doctor was speaking with a judicial note in his voice, the scientist in full stride now. "The well-established ethnic rule, the biological certainty in cases of miscegenation between Caucasians or quasi-Caucasians and the Negro or negroid types is that the offspring is never darker than the darker of the two parents. The 'black-baby' tradition, as a 'throw-back' being produced by mulatto or nearly Caucasian parents is a bugaboo, Canevin, sheer boah! It doesn't happen that way. It cannot happen. It is a biological impossibility, my dear man. Although widely believed, that idea falls into the same category as the ostrich burying its head in the sand and thinking it is concealed! It falls in with the Amazon myth! The 'Amazons' were merely long-haired Scythians, those 'women-warriors' of antiquity. Why, damn it, Canevin, it's like believing in the Centaur to swallow a thing like that."

THE doctor had become quite excited over his expression of biological orthodoxy. He glared at me, or appeared to, and lighted a fresh cigarette. Then, considering for a moment, while he inhaled a few preliminary puffs, he resumed:

"You see what that proves, don't you, Canevin?" he inquired, somewhat more calmly now.

"It seems to show," I answered, "since Brutus is very 'clear-colored,' as the Negroes would say, that one of

his parents was a black; the other very considerably lighter, perhaps even a pure Caucasian."

"Right, so far," acquiesced the doctor. "And the other inference, in the case of twins—what?"

"That the twins were 'dizygotic,' even though attached," said I, slowly, as the conclusion came clear in my mind after Pelletier's preparatory speech. "Otherwise, of course, if they were the other kind, the mono-cellular or 'monozygotic,' they would have the same coloration, derived from either the dark or the light-skinned parent."

"Precisely," exclaimed Dr. Pelletier. "Now—"

"You mentioned certain other facts," I interrupted, "'more deep-seated,' I think you said. What—"

"I was just coming to those, Canevin. There are, actually, two such considerations which occur to me. First—why did the Thing degenerate, undoubtedly after birth, of course, if there were no pre-natal process of degeneration? They would have been nearly of a size, anyway, when born, I'd suppose. Why did 'It' shrink up into a withered, apparently lifeless little homunculus, while its fellow twin, Brutus Hellman, attained to a normal manhood? There are some pretty deep matters involved in those queries, Canevin. It was comatose, shrunken, virtually dead while attached."

"Let's see if we can't make a guess at them," I threw in.

"What would you say?" countered Dr. Pelletier.

**I** NODDED, and sat silently for several minutes trying to put what was in my mind together in some coherent form so as to express it adequately. Then:

"A couple of possibilities occur to me," I began. "One or both of them might account for the divergence. First, the failure of one or more of

the ductless glands, very early in the Thing's life after birth. It's the thymus gland, isn't it, that regulates the physical growth of an infant—that makes him grow normally. If that fails before it has done its full work, about the end of the child's second year, you get a midget. If, on the other hand, it keeps on too long—does not dry up as it should, and cease functioning, its normal task finished—the result is a giant; the child simply goes on growing, bigger and bigger! Am I right, so far? And, I suppose, the cutting process released it from its coma."

"Score one!" said Dr. Pelletier, wagging his head at me. "Go on—what else? There are many cases, of course, of blood-letting ending a coma."

"The second guess is that Brutus had the stronger constitution, and outstripped the other one. It doesn't sound especially scientific, but that sort of thing does happen as I understand it. Beyond those two possible explanations I shouldn't care to risk any more guesses."

"I think both those causes have been operative in this case," said Dr. Pelletier, reflectively. "And, having performed that operation, you see, I think I might add a third, Canevin. It is purely conjectural. I'll admit that frankly, but one outstanding circumstance supports it. I'll come back to that shortly. In short, Canevin, I imagine—my instinct tells me—that almost from the beginning, quite unconsciously, of course, and in the automatic processes of outstripping his twin in physical growth, *Brutus absorbed the other's share of nutriment.*

**I** CAN figure that out, in fact, from several possible angles. The early nursing, for instance! The mother—she was, undoubtedly, the black parent—proud of her 'clear' child, would favor it, nurse it first. There is, besides, always some more

or less obscure interplay, some balanced adjustment, between physically attached twins. In this case, God knows how, that invariable 'balance' became disadjusted; the adjustment became unbalanced, if you prefer it that way. The mother, too, from whose side the dark twin probably derived its constitution, may very well have been a small, weakly woman. The fair-skinned other parent was probably robust, physically. But, whatever the underlying causes, we know that Brutus grew up to be normal and fully mature, and I know, from that operation, that the Thing I cut away from him was his twin brother, degenerated into an apparently lifeless homunculus, a mere appendage of Brutus, something which, *apparently, had quite lost nearly everything of its basic humanity*; even most of its appearance, Canevin—a Thing to be removed surgically, like a wen."

"It is a terrible idea," said I, slowly, and after an interval. "But, it seems to be the only way to explain, er—the facts! Now tell me, if you please, what is that 'outstanding circumstance' you mentioned which corroborates this, er—theory of yours."

"It is the Thing's *motive*, Canevin," said Dr. Pelletier, very gravely, "allowing, of course, that we are right—that I am right—in assuming for lack of a better hypothesis that what I cut away from Hellman had life in it; that it 'escaped'; that it is now—well, in trying to get at a thing like that, under the circumstances, I'd be inclined to say, we touch bottom!"

"Good God—the *motive*!" I almost whispered. "Why, its horrible, Pelletier; its positively uncanny. The thing becomes, quite definitely, a horror. The motive—in that Thing! You're right, old man. Psychologically speaking, it 'touches bottom,' as you say."

"And humanly speaking," added

Dr. Pelletier, in a very quiet voice.

STEPHEN came out and announced breakfast. It was one o'clock. We went in and ate rather silently. As Stephen was serving the dessert Dr. Pelletier spoke to him:

"Was Hellman's father a white man, do you happen to know, Stephen?"

"De man was an engineer on board an English trading vessel, sar."

"What about his mother?" probed the doctor.

"Her a resident of Antigua, sar," replied Stephen promptly, "and is yet alive. I am acquainted with her. Hellman ahlways send her some portion of his earnings, sar, very regularly. At de time Hellman born, her a 'ooman which do washing for ships' crews, an' make an excellent living. Nowadays, de poor soul liddle more than a piteous invalid, sar. Her ahlways a small liddle 'ooman, not too atrong."

"I take it she is a dark woman?" remarked the doctor, smiling at Stephen.

Stephen, who is a medium brown young man, a "Zambo," as they say in the English Islands like St. Kitts and Montserrat and Antigua, grinned broadly at this, displaying a set of magnificent, glistening teeth.

"Sar," he replied, "Hellman' mother de precisely identical hue of dis fella," and Stephen touched with his index finger the neat black bow-tie which set off the snowy whiteness of his immaculate drill house-man's jacket. Pelletier and I exchanged glances as we smiled at Stephen's little joke.

ON the gallery immediately after lunch, over coffee, we came back to that bizarre topic which Dr. Pelletier had called the "motive." Considered quite apart from the weird aspect of attributing a motive to a quasi-human creature of the size of a rat, the matter was clear enough.

The Thing had relentlessly attacked Brutus Hellman again and again, with an implacable fiendishness; its brutal, single-minded efforts being limited in their disastrous effects only by its diminutive size and relative deficiency of strength. Even so, it had succeeded in driving a full-grown man, its victim, into a condition not very far removed from imbecility.

What obscure processes had gone on piling up cumulatively to a fixed purpose of pure destruction in that primitive, degenerated organ that served the Thing for a brain! What dreadful weeks and months and years of semi-conscious brooding, of existence endured parasitically as an appendage upon the instinctively loathed body of the normal brother! What savage hatred had burned itself into that minute, distorted personality! What incalculable instincts, deep buried in the backgrounds of the black heredity through the mother, had come into play—as evidenced by the Thing's construction of the typical African hut as its habitation—once it had come, after the separation, into active consciousness, the new-born, freshly-realized freedom to exercise and release all that acrid, seething hatred upon him who had usurped its powers of self-expression, its very life itself! What manifold thwarted instincts had, by the processes of substitution, crystallized themselves into one overwhelming, driving desire—the consuming instinct for revenge!

I shuddered as all this clarified itself in my mind, as I formed, vaguely, some kind of mental image of that personality. Dr. Pelletier was speaking again. I forced my engrossed mind to listen to him. He seemed very grave and determined, I noticed. . . .

"We must put an end to all this, Canevin," he was saying. "Yes, we must put an end to it."

## CHAPTER XI

### *The Last Attack*

EVER since that first Sunday evening when the attacks began, as I look back over that hectic period, it seems to me that I had had in mind primarily the idea of capture and destruction of what had crystallized in my mind as "The Thing." Now a new and totally bizarre idea came in to cause some mental conflict with the destruction element in that vague plan. This was the almost inescapable conviction that the Thing had been originally—whatever it might be properly named now—a human being. As such, knowing well, as I did, the habits of the blacks of our Lesser Antilles, it had, unquestionably, been received into the church by the initial process of baptism. That indescribable creature which had been an appendage on Brutus Hellman's body, had been, was now, according to the teaching of the church, a Christian. The idea popped into my mind along with various other sidelights on the situation, stimulated into being by the discussion with Dr. Pelletier which I have just recorded.

The idea itself was distressing enough, to one who, like myself, have always kept up the teachings of my own childhood, who has never found it necessary, in these days of mental unrest, to doubt, still less to abandon, his religion. One of the concomitants of this idea was that the destruction of the Thing after its problematical capture, would be an awkward affair upon my conscience, for, however far departed the Thing had got from its original status as "A child of God—an Inheritor of The Kingdom of Heaven," it must retain, in some obscure fashion, its human, indeed its Christian, standing. There are those, doubtless, who might well regard this scruple of mine as quite utterly ridiculous, who would lay all the stress on the plain necessity of

stopping the Thing's destructive malignancy without reference to any such apparently far-fetched and artificial considerations. Nevertheless this aspect of our immediate problem, Pelletier's gravely enunciated dictum: "We must put an end to all this," weighed heavily on my burdened mind. It must be remembered that I had put in a dreadful week over the affair.

I mention this "scruple" of mine because it throws up into relief, in a sense, those events which followed very shortly after Dr. Pelletier had summed up what necessarily lay before us, in that phrase of his.

WE sat on the gallery and cogitated ways and means, and it was in the midst of this discussion that the scruple alluded to occurred to me. I did not mention it to Pelletier. I mentally conceded, of course, the necessity of capture. The subsequent disposal of the Thing could wait on that.

We had pretty well decided, on the evidence, that the Thing had been lying low during the day in the little hut-like arrangement which it appeared to have built for itself. Its attacks so far had occurred only at night. If we were correct, the capture would be a comparatively simple affair. There was, as part of the equipment in my house, a small bait net, of the circular, closing-in-from-the-bottom kind, used occasionally when I took guests on a deep-sea fishing excursion out to Congo or Levango Bays. This I unearthed, and looked over. It was intact, recently mended, without any holes in the tightly meshed netting designed to capture and retain small fish to be used later as live bait.

Armed with this, our simple plan readily in mind, we proceeded together to the alleyway about half-past two that afternoon, or, to be more precise, we were just at the moment starting down the gallery steps

leading into my yard, when our ears were assailed by a succession of piercing, childish screams from the vicinity of the house's rear.

I rushed down the steps, four at a time, the more unwieldy Pelletier following me as closely as his propulsive apparatus would allow. I was in time to see, when I reached the corner of the house, nearly everything that was happening, almost from its beginning. It was a scene which, reproduced in a drawing accurately limned, would appear wholly comic. Little Aesculapius, the washer's small, black child, his eyes popping nearly from his head, his diminutive black legs twinkling under his single flying garment, his voice uttering blood-curdling yowls of pure terror, raced diagonally across the yard in the direction of his mother's washtub near the kitchen door, the very embodiment of crude, ungovernable fright, a veritable caricature, a figure of fun.

AND behind him, coming on implacably, for all the world like a misshapen black frog, bounded the Thing, in hot pursuit, its red tongue lolling out of its gash of a mouth, its diminutive blubbery lips drawn back in a wide snarl through which a murderous row of teeth flashed viciously in the pouring afternoon sunlight. Little Aesculapius was making good the promise of his relatively long, thin legs, fright driving him. He outdistanced the Thing hopelessly, yet it forged ahead in a rolling, leaping series of bounds, using hands and arms, frog-like, as well as its strange, withered, yet strangely powerful banded legs.

The sight, grotesque as it would have been to anyone unfamiliar with the Thing's history and identity, positively sickened me. My impulse was to cover my face with my hands, in the realization of its underlying horror. I could feel a faint nausea creeping over me, beginning to dim



my senses. My washerwoman's screams had added to the confusion within a second or two after those of the child had begun, and now, as I hesitated in my course towards the scene of confusion, those of the cook and scullery-maid were added to the cacophonous din in my back yard. Little Aesculapius, his garment stiff against the breeze of his own progress, disappeared around the rear-most corner of the house to comparative safety through the open kitchen door. He had, as I learned sometime afterwards, been playing about the yard and had happened upon the little hut in its obscure and seldom-visited alleyway. He had stooped, intrigued by this unusual plaything, and picked it up. "The Thing"—the child used that precise term to describe it—lay, curled up, asleep within. It had leaped to its splayed feet with a snarl of rage, and gone straight for the little Negro's foot.

Thereafter the primitive instinct for self-preservation and Aesculapius' excellent footwork had solved his problem. He reached the kitchen door, around the corner and out of our sight, plunged within, and took immediate refuge atop the shelf of a kitchen cabinet well out of reach of that malignant, unheard-of demon like a big black frog which was pursuing him and which, doubtless, would haunt his dreams for the rest of his existence. So much for little Aesculapius, who thus happily passes out of the affair.

MY halting was, of course, only momentary. I paused, as I have mentioned, but for so brief a period as not to allow Dr. Pelletier to catch up with me. I ran, then, with the net open in my hands, diagonally across the straight course being pursued by the Thing. My mind was made up to intercept It, entangle It in the meshes. This should not be difficult considering its smallness and the comparative short-

ness of Its arms and legs; and, having rendered It helpless, to face the ultimate problem of Its later disposal.

But this plan of mine was abruptly interfered with. Precisely as the flying body of the pursued pick'nny disappeared around the corner of the house, my cook's cat, a ratter with a neighborhood reputation and now, although for the moment I failed to realize it, quite clearly an instrument of that Providence responsible for my "scruple," came upon the scene with violence, precision, and that uncanny accuracy which actuates the feline in all its physical manifestations.

This avatar, which, according to a long-established custom, had been sunning itself demurely on the edge of the rain-water piping which ran along the low eaves of the three yard cabins, aroused by the discordant yells of the child and the three women in four distinct keys, had arisen, taken a brief, preliminary stretch, and condescended to turn its head towards the scene below. . . .

The momentum of the cat's leap arrested instantaneously the Thing's course of pursuit, bore it, sprawled out and flattened, to the ground, and twenty sharp powerful retractile claws sank simultaneously into the prone little body.

THE Thing never moved again. A more merciful snuffing out would be difficult to imagine.

It was a matter of no difficulty to drive Junius, the cat, away from his kill. I am on terms of pleasant intimacy with Junius. He allowed me to take the now limp and flaccid little body away from him quite without protest, and sat down where he was, licking his paws and readjusting his rumpied fur.

And thus, unexpectedly, without intervention on our part, Pelletier and I saw brought to its sudden end, the tragical dénouement of what

seems to me to be one of the most outlandish and most distressing affairs which could ever have been evolved out of the mad mentality of Satan, who dwells in his own place to distress the children of men.

And that night, under a flagstone in the alleyway, quite near where the Thing's strange habitation had been taken up, I buried the mangled leathery little body of that unspeakably grotesque homunculus which had once been the twin brother

of my house-man, Brutus Hellman. In consideration of my own scruple which I have mentioned, and because, in all probability, this handful of strange material which I lowered gently into its last resting-place had once been a Christian, I repeated the Prayer of Committal from the Book of Common Prayer. It may have been—doubtless was, in one sense—a grotesque act on my part. But I cherish the conviction that I did what was right.

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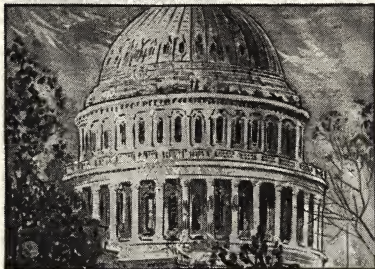
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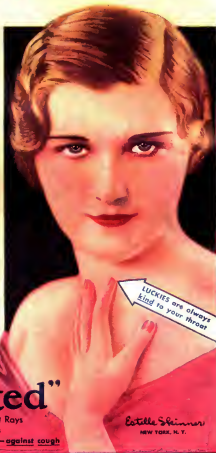
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